

Maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in enhancing coordination on environment in the UN system in the context of the post 2015 Development Agenda

A Discussion Note including a Terms of Reference

Summary :

This note is provided by the EMG Secretariat in follow up of Decision 8 of the 20th meeting of the EMG senior officials on “Maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the post 2015 development agenda”, to help the designated EMG Task Team set out the scope and modalities of its work and address the key issues in preparation of its report for consideration at the 21st meeting of the senior officials in September 2015.

Background:

The Environmental Management Group was established by the United Nations General Assembly in paragraph 5 of its resolution 53/242 of 1999, on the basis of proposals by the Secretary-General and the report of a United Nations Task Team (A/53/463), headed by the then Executive Director of UNEP. All the agencies of the United Nations system, Secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are members of the Environmental Management Group. UNEP is to provide the secretariat for the Environmental Management Group. The Group’s mandate covers coordinated approaches, information exchange, promotion of joint action by United Nations agencies and synergy among and between the activities of the United Nations agencies on environment and human settlement issues. It was intended to function through issue-management groups to be set up for dealing with specific issues in a time-bound manner.

The Environmental Management Group started functioning in January 2001. A secretariat was established in June. The Group has held 20 meetings so far and has established Issue Management Groups (IMGs) on issues such as harmonization of reporting on biodiversity-related conventions, sustainable procurement, environmental aspects of water and sanitation, capacity-building in the areas of biodiversity and chemicals, UN system contribution to the biodiversity and the Aichi Targets, green economy and drylands. Currently there are six IMGs and inter-agency consultative processes addressing UN system coordination of global environmental issues as well as enhancing UN internal sustainability performance¹. Most of the IMGs and processes have prepared UN system-wide reports contributing to intergovernmental processes, such as the Conference of the Parties of the MEAs and decisions of the UNEP Governing Council (now United Nations Environment Assembly), the UN General Assembly, the Rio+20 Conference, as well as the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its subsidiary bodies. The progress reports of the EMG have been regularly provided by its chair to the Governing Council of UNEP (now UNEA) and through UNEP to the UN General Assembly.

Rationale and scope of the process

The EMG was established following the reform agenda of the then Secretary-General of the UN to improve inter-agency coordination in the field of the environment and human settlements. The key expectations of the EMG when established were that it would enable the UN bodies and their partners to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives, contribute to a planning framework, and agree on priorities and on the respective

¹ Issue Management Group on the sound management of chemicals and waste
 Issue Management Group on environmental sustainability management
 Consultative Process on advancing environmental and social sustainability in the UN system
 Task Team on maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the 2015 development agenda
 Peer-Reviews of environmental management of the EMG members
 Task Team on the System Wide Strategy on the Environment in the UN system

roles of agencies in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of resources. The EMG was expected to provide a forum and a mechanism to enhance complementarity between the analytical/normative activities and the operational role of the UN system agencies through adopting a problem-solving, results oriented approach. It was further envisaged that the reports of the Group would be made available to relevant intergovernmental bodies to enhance intergovernmental policy coherence.

In light of the post 2015 development agenda, Member States have invited the Executive Director of UNEP to examine if the EMG, after having functioned for 14 years, has responded to the expectations and whether it is fit to respond to today's coordination challenges in the field of environment. Resolution 11 of the First Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, invited the Executive Director of UNEP as Chair of the EMG, to identify possible measures to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Group in consultation with the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board, and to submit a report with recommendations to the UNEA for consideration at its second session.

The 20th meeting of the senior officials of the EMG, held on 25 September 2014 in New York, considered this issue and agreed to establish a task team on the issue of maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG, to consider the EMG's mandate, Terms of Reference, effectiveness and fitness for purpose more broadly, including its contribution to the post 2015 development agenda. They further agreed to consider the progress of the task team at their next meeting, with a view to provide their input to the report of the Chair of the EMG to the Second Session of the UNEA.

The following key issues/questions are intended to help this Task Team to further define its tasks and scope of work.

a. EMG approach and modality of work

- i. Is the issue-based and time-bound approach sufficient and still suitable for addressing and responding to today's coordination challenges and ensuring an appropriate response?
- ii. What should the criteria be for selecting issues for consideration of the EMG, and how should these issues be effectively identified and prepared? Should the issue-based and time-bound approach be applied to all issues, and if not, what other forms of collaborative work could be considered?
- iii. Could some of the issues, especially in the field of UN environmental sustainability management, monitoring and reporting, benefit from a long-term approach in the form of technical advice and service to EMG members? If so, how could this aspect of the EMG's work best be organized and supported by its member agencies?
- iv. When and how should the reports of the EMG be communicated to the governing bodies of its members, or to other intergovernmental instances of the UN system?

b. Linkages with the wider coordination system including the CEB

The Task Team is encouraged to consider how the work of the EMG could be more effectively and systemically linked to, add value to and serve the agenda of the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB) and its subsidiary bodies, or other coordination mechanisms within the UN system. A good example of such cooperation is the recent decision of the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the CEB to work with the EMG on developing and implementing Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in the UN System.

- i. How should the EMG interface with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its main committees, or with any other coordination mechanisms of the UN system, such as the UN Development Group (UNDG)?
- ii. What approaches to environmental issues do the other coordination bodies take, how does the EMG fit into this context and how can the EMG best add value?
- iii. How can it be ensured that environmental dimensions and responses prepared under the EMG are followed up and systematically taken into account in all planning processes, ensuring mainstreaming of the environment across sectors and at all levels?
- iv. Can the approach to collaboration with the HLCM on the EMS be replicated with the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) in other areas to enhance coherence in the formulation of environmental policies (including work in the area of norms and standards)? Can the EMG play a role with the UNDG?

c. Fitness for purpose and contribution to the Post 2015 development agenda

EMG members may also provide their views on the effectiveness of the EMG in coordinating system-wide efforts in the area of environmental sustainability issues in the context of the post 2015 development agenda, in terms of its ability, capacity, approach and working modalities.

- i. Taking into account the mandate and approach set out in the decision establishing the EMG in 1999 and considering subsequent developments, is the EMG fit for the purpose of serving cross-cutting environmental issues of the post-2015 development agenda?
- ii. If not, what amendments to its mandate or working modalities could be envisaged?
- iii. Is the EMG institutionally equipped to address, for example, the environmental dimensions of the SDGs?
- iv. What other possible functions should/could the EMG shoulder?

The Task Team - composition, tasks and modality of work:

The Task Team is composed of focal points nominated by EMG members and is open to observers if deemed necessary. It will meet mostly through electronic means to consider the progress of the process and decide on the next steps. The task team will be supported by the EMG Secretariat to organize its meetings, collect and compile information, liaise with stakeholders, prepare data analysis and progress reports and issue the final report.

The Task Team shall organise its work in the following order/phases taking into account the time frame and resources required to submit its report for consideration of the 21st SOM:

a) Preparation of its Terms of Reference

The Task Team may consider agreeing on its TOR, activities, time frame and modality of work at its first meeting.

The TOR may include activities in the following stages:

b) FIRST PHASE : Mapping-Stocktaking

- EMG's mandate and origins (inter-agency and intergovernmental) to set the context
- Major reports (JIU, OIOS, etc.), decisions, Resolutions, etc. (UNEP GC, MEAs, GA, HLPF) on the role, contribution and areas of further focus of the EMG
- EMG activities and outcomes since its inception and the achieved results as a factual basis to measure the success and effectiveness
- Views and perspectives of the EMG members on the effectiveness of the EMG's role and its services and its being fit for purpose to address today's challenges of environmental coordination in the UN system
- Views, perspectives and expectations of other stakeholders, such as Member States and Civil Society, looking at the EMG from a wider and external angle and its relevance in addressing global environmental challenges
- Views and perspectives of sister inter-agency coordination mechanisms, such as those under the CEB, HLCP, HLCM, UN Water, UN OCEANS, on the linkages with the EMG and the challenges so far

c) SECOND PHASE: Analysis

- Assessments of the EMG's past work, successes and challenges, possibly evaluating EMG's overall impact on the formulation of environmental policies and implementation in the UN system at various levels, including in the formulation of the environmental components of the post – 2015 sustainable development agenda.
- Structure (including chairing arrangements) relationship with EMG members as well as the position of the EMG in UNEP
- Modalities of work and reporting to various UN and intergovernmental fora

- Relationship with CEB and other coordination boards
- Relationship with NGOs and other civil society groups
- Relationship with Member States
- Agenda setting and criteria for issue selection
- Strategic Focus:
 - promoting programmatic environmental issues within various sectors in the UN system,
 - promoting dialogue and information/knowledge exchange on environmental matters
 - contributing to major intergovernmental fora
 - advancing UN internal sustainability matters
- Feasibility of expanding the focus to including explicit integration and consideration of human settlements issues, as per original mandate, and the implications for the membership and working modalities of the EMG.

d) *THIRD PHASE: Synopsis Report and suggested Options for EMG SOM21*

A focused and forward-looking interagency assessment report is prepared for consideration of the 21st senior officials meeting of the EMG in the fall of 2015, with a view to provide options for strengthening the EMG and its impact and utility, including its relationship with other system-wide coordination mechanisms, its working methods and approach, its governance and service delivery and the relevance of its mandate in relation to today's environmental challenges and follow up of the SDGs etc.

e) *FOURTH PHASE: Follow up on EMG SOM 21*

Further work on the report and sharing it with other inter-agency coordination mechanisms for comments, such as those under the CEB.

f) *FIFTH PHASE: Finalisation and submission of the Report for Submission to UNEA2*

Timeframe and tentative process

The Task Force is constituted for a period of two years and shall take into account the following tentative process and timeline:

November December 2014	<i>Nomination</i> by EMG members of focal points to the Task Force and <i>consultations</i> on draft agenda for the first meeting of the Task Force <i>First meeting of the Task Force</i> (tentatively 15 December) to amongst others consider priorities, timeframe and process for its work including the outline and process for the preparation of the assessment report.
January – March 2015	<i>First phase of the process</i> i.e. solicitation of information needs and review of available information to provide a basis for analysis of the UN system perspectives.
April 2015	<i>Second meeting of the Task Force</i> (possibly in person, 1 for Geneva-based and 1 for NY-based agencies) to e.g: a) Consider the compilation report of the feedbacks received b) Consider the second phase of the process for preparation of the synopsis report
May-June 2015	<i>Second Phase of the Process</i> , the Task Force will work on data analysis and preparation of the synopsis report with the support of the EMG Secretariat.
July 2015	<i>Second meeting of the Task Force to consider the draft synopsis report and agree on the content and modality of its presentation to the SOM including</i> (i.e. preparation of draft and two rounds of internal reviews as well as clearance of the report by individual agencies).

July-September 2015	<i>Third Phase of the process and third meeting of the Task Force</i> a) Finalisation of the Synopsis Report and suggested options for EMG SOM21. b) Submission of the Report to the 21st senior officials meeting of the EMG
October 2015 March 2016	<i>Fourth Phase of the Process and fourth meeting of the Task Force Follow up on EMG SOM 21 and integrate and complement the report</i> a) Submission to other inter-agency coordination boards, such as those under the CEB b) Incorporation of comments and finalisation of the report c) Submission of a draft report on 18 October for consideration of the UNEP CPR in preparation of UNEA2
April-May 2016	<i>Fifth Phase of the Process: Editing, lay out and publication of the report</i> and preparation of communication and guidance material for submission to the UNEA2
September 2016	<i>The 22nd meeting of the senior officials of the EMG</i> to consider the outcome of the UNEA's consideration of the report and its follow up decision

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