



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG

"Supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by enhancing UN system-wide collaboration and coherent responses on environmental matters"

Meeting of the Consultative Process for Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System

Work Stream 2: Common Approach to Environmental and Social Standards for Programming

28-30 June 2017

Hosted by UNOPS, Copenhagen Denmark

Draft Meeting Summary

1. Background

The Senior Officials of the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) agreed in September 2016 to establish a new work stream under the "Consultative Process on Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system" to consider options for moving towards a common approach to environmental and social standards for programmes/projects. The work stream is jointly led by IFAD and UNDP.

2. Objective

Discuss initial findings of comparative analysis and clarify the 'vision' for a common approach – What will it provide? Level of detail? How it will be used?

3. Key Highlights and Conclusions

The consultant presented initial results of the **comparative analysis**. The group was supportive of methodology and approach being taken. Initial results show that there is already strong commonality across the different safeguards frameworks being put in place by agencies. The discussion focussed on results related to biodiversity, indigenous peoples and human rights.

It was noted that the comparative analysis should also cover exclusion lists and differentiated approaches (e.g. for different country contexts) that agencies apply. The analysis should also take note of the governance/decision-making mechanisms agencies need to go through to develop/update their safeguard policies/procedures (e.g. Board approval or internal process).

The group agreed on the need to include a comparison of how agencies (particularly humanitarian agencies) apply safeguards in **emergency/crisis contexts**. The EMG work stream needs to link up with the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU) process that is working on developing rapid assessment tools/guidance.

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The nine UN Agencies participating in the workshop renewed their commitment to completing the comparative analysis of their respective environmental and social standards and formulating a set of collective minimum requirements. The discussion reinforced the **rationale** for a common approach, noting the following key objectives which should inform its elaboration:

- Delivering as One: to ensure normative principles of the UN are consistently operationalized through programming, at the country level in particular.
- Communication: to allow UN entities to collectively communicate to partners (e.g. at Country level, civil society, vertical funds) to explain how we are applying a common approach and moving towards greater alignment.
- Fit for Purpose/SDGs: to demonstrate the UN system is walking the talk and integrating the SDG agenda into the way we do our work.
- Efficiencies: to enable the use of a shared trainings, tools, rosters, and guidance materials benefitting from relevant expertise from across the system.
- Access to financing: to help ensure continued access to financing that is increasingly tied to social and environmental safeguards and accountability policies.
- Joint Programming: to facilitate the use of a shared process to apply safeguards in the context of joint programming.
- Collective Learning: to support a collective learning approach to the application of safeguards in UN programming.

The group reiterated the **basis** and starting point for the common approach:

- UN normative framework (most important) and normative expertise within the system (noted that OHCHR, UN-Women and UNESCO should be invited to contribute relevant expertise)
- EMG Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework
- UNDG principles
- Comparative analysis and existing commonality across safeguard frameworks in UN system
- Standard practice/lessons learned (both internal/external to UN)
- Consultative process (right now the focus is on system-wide consultations through the EMG; when and how external stakeholders will be consulted flagged as something that will need to be considered)

Key **considerations for the development of the common approach** and how it will be used:

- Need to ensure flexibility to allow for differing mandates, governance structures, operating modalities, but at the same time with enough specificity to be a meaningful move towards better alignment.
- The common approach should help agencies that already have safeguards to identify/fill gaps and also provide a basis for agencies that are just starting the process to develop them. The purpose is not to develop a framework for adoption verbatim by each agency or to replace what they already have.
- Should take into account the needs of agencies to remain in compliance with the minimum standards of key multilateral donors, such as the Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund.
- For the common approach to be meaningful, need to ensure a level of specificity that goes beyond high level principle statements to the next level of minimum requirements.

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- Needs to take a phased approach whereby it will be applied initially by interested agencies through a time-bound voluntary phase, followed by a report back on lessons learned, challenges, etc. to refine further and scale up.
- Needs to be relevant for both development and humanitarian sides of the UN system (need to link up with the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU) process that is developing rapid assessment tools/guidance). This work can contribute to the New Way of Working¹, supporting a principled approach to humanitarian assistance that can help strengthen the link with development.
- Need to frame the Common Approach as presenting what we are already doing to realize our commitments to apply environmental and social standards, with renewed focus on strengthening alignment (rather than presenting this as something completely new).
- Content of Common Approach needs to balance "do no harm" and "do good" considerations.

The group agreed that the **structure** of the comparative analysis (i.e. a set of thematic areas followed by minimum requirements) provided a good framework for elaborating the common approach. The common approach will be articulated in a document with the following content:

- Intro on background, rationale, what the Common Approach is/isn't and how it is intended to be used
- Thematic areas and sub-headings: the headings used in the comparative analysis provide a good basis, to be tweaked as needed once the analysis is complete. Currently:
 - Screening, Assessment, Management
 - Stakeholder Engagement, Disclosure, Accountability Mechanism
 - Human Rights
 - Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality
 - Biodiversity, Natural Habitats, Sustainable Natural Resources Management
 - Indigenous Peoples
 - Physical and Economic Displacement, Involuntary Resettlement
 - Community Health, Safety, Security
 - Labour and Working Conditions
 - Cultural Heritage, Physical Cultural Resources
 - Pollution Prevention, Pesticides, Resource Efficiency
 - Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, Disaster Risk
- Minimum requirements will be identified for each of the thematic areas (short bullets articulating key requirements that derive from normative framework and/or standard practice in safeguards)

The group agreed that it would be helpful to accompany the common approach with **guidance** related to the minimum requirements by clarifying the normative basis where relevant, links to available guidance, tools, resources, and examples of types of risks (noting that this goes beyond the current budget available for the consultant's support).

¹ <http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/5358>



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4. Updates on progress made in Work Streams 1 and 3

An update of the progress made within Work Stream 1 on revising the Interim Guide was provided by the work stream chair (UN Environment). Participants heard a presentation by Dr. Maria Rosario Partidario on the definition of the policy entry point of the ESS Framework and discussed the revision of the Interim Guide based on a zero draft of an Implementation Guide which had been shared with members in advance of the meeting. Participants arrived at the conclusion that the added value of a separate implementation Guide is no longer evident, taking into consideration the existing guidance material for the different entry points (such as the EMS toolkit which is being developed and the on-going work on the common approach to standards in programming). It was therefore suggested that existing guidance material, including that of the Interim Guide, would instead be compiled and portrayed on a specific webpage on the EMG website, which would be created for this purpose. Consequently, the development of an Implementation Guide for the Framework will not be sustained, while the work to define the policy entry point of the Framework will continue.

An update of the progress made in Work Stream 3 on communication was provided by its Co-chair (UNOPS). The work stream was advised to prepare a 2-pager that explains the relevance of the internal sustainability work and to present a draft to the Senior Officials Meeting in September. The specific purpose, key messages and audience of the brochure need further clarification.

5. Next Steps

- Ahead of EMG SOM (18 & 20 September, 2017):
 - Co-chairs (UNDP and IFAD) to prepare a short briefing note for working group members to use to communicate with senior management and ensure their support. Will also be shared with SOM.
 - Co-chairs together with EMG Secretariat to prepare a progress report and proposed decision(s) for SOM. Proposed decision to extend work stream for another year to allow for preparation of the draft common approach and initiation of a voluntary phase of application.
- Co-chairs will organize regular teleconferences around the remaining thematic areas for consultant to present results of comparative analysis and proposed minimum requirements to be included in the common approach. Calls will also be an opportunity for agencies to exchange lessons learned and challenges around implementation of some of the requirements.
- After minimum requirements are drafted for each thematic area, relevant experts from across the system will also be invited to provide feedback.
- EMG Secretariat to explore how to link up with UNDG processes.
- An idea that was floated, for discussion at the next workshop, was to develop a joint initiative to support countries to apply social and environmental safeguards, bringing to the country the relevant expertise from within the UN system.
- Consultant to organize a discussion with UNHCR and WFP specifically to discuss issues around application in humanitarian contexts.
- UN-EMG Secretariat will provide a platform for sharing of documents and reference material.

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- Next EMG meeting of the consultative process for environmental and social sustainability in the UN system will take place in spring 2018, once the comparative analysis is completed and following a period of virtual consultation. That meeting will aim to finalize the common approach.
- Members need to discuss the group's work plan and budget to finalize the common approach and to elaborate guidance (not covered under current work plan and budget).

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Annex 1

List of Participants

Name	Organization
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Mark Davis	FAO
Dorit Kemter	ILO
Holly Mergler	UNDP
Bruce Jenkins	Consultant
Jannica Pitkanen Brunnsberg	UNEP -EMG
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