



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG
24th Senior Officials Meeting
Monday 24th September 2018
Issue Note
Submitting organization:
United Nations Environment Programme
Summary:

The EMG Senior Officials are invited to consider a proposal by UN Environment on a policy dialogue for enhancing collaboration among UN entities on sustainable development and greening of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Senior Officials are invited to highlight their agencies' ongoing or planned engagements and opportunities for collaborative action in this regard. The discussion could help identify key messages from the UN system regarding the connections between the Belt and Road Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is suggested that a Task Team of interested agencies takes the outcome of the discussion forward.

Issue:
The Belt and Road initiative – coordinated engagement by the United Nations in the initiative's environmental dimensions
Key discussion items:

1. What is the role of the UN system in the Belt and Road Initiative?
2. How to ensure that the Initiative contributes to sustainable environmental development in line with the Sustainable Development Goals?
3. What are the key messages from the UN system regarding the connections between the Belt and Road Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Annexes:
[EMGSOM24 INF - 6. UN Environment Belt and Road Strategy](#)
Background and UN dimensions:

In 2013, China announced the Belt and Road Initiative to expand the ancient trade routes across six economic corridors: China-Mongolia-Russia corridor, New Eurasian Land Bridge linking China's coastal cities to Rotterdam in the Netherlands, China-Central Asia-West Asia corridor, China-Indochina

Peninsula corridor, China-Pakistan corridor and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor. The Initiative will involve trillions of dollars of investments, largely in transportation, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure, industrial capacity, and technical capacity building. Since the launch of the Initiative, more than 100 countries and international organizations have supported and got involved in this initiative.

Like any other large-scale development, the initiative poses significant social, economic, and environmental challenges that could seriously undermine concerned countries' abilities to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition to immediate biophysical impacts, if Belt and Road investments lock countries into unsustainable infrastructure, technology, and resource extraction, these will have long-lasting negative impacts. However, with the right policies and safeguards in place, the Initiative has significant potential to help countries work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

An annual investment of \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion is likely to be required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and a significant portion of that investment will need to be into infrastructure. Although infrastructure is only explicitly mentioned in SDG 9, it underlies almost all other social-economic SDGs and the way infrastructure is designed, implemented, managed and operated has implications for all environmental SDGs. With its primary focus on infrastructure investment, the Belt and Road Initiative therefore has the potential to play an important part in meeting the sustainable development financing gap.

Many United Nations organizations recognize the potential of the Belt and Road Initiative to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and acknowledge the need to help Member States to address its challenges. The heads of 28 UN Agencies attended China's high-level Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May 2017, and many of those organizations have signed memoranda of understanding with China related to Belt and Road development. Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative has been cited in a recent UN Security Council resolution as an important driver of regional development, particularly in post-conflict and disaster areas.

The United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization, for example, are among many that have signed agreements with China on Belt and Road cooperation. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has set up a platform for international dialogues on inclusive and sustainable cities in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres describes the (modern) silk road as "the gateway to global prosperity".

Proposed areas of cooperation:

Despite the wide recognition amongst UN Agencies of the importance of engaging with the Belt and Road Initiative, it is currently being done only on an ad hoc basis, and there is no coordinated, clearly defined UN position on the Belt and Road Initiative. Intra-UN coordination of its engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative will allow UN Agencies to provide clear messaging, streamline engagement with Member States, and address some of the political challenges associated with the Belt and Road Initiative.

It is proposed that an inter-agency Task Team is established under the Environment Management Group, as a platform for interested agencies to:

- Identify and map out UN agencies potential contributions to the greening of the belt and road initiative;
- Identifying possible coordination strategies between UN agencies on their engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative;
- Identifying the key messages from the UN system regarding the connections between the Belt and Road Initiative and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Identify potentials for addressing the environmental dimensions of the Initiative in a collective manner.

Proposed next steps:

- 1- Establishment and nomination of the focal points of interested agencies to the Task Team;
- 2- EMG Secretariat, in consultation with UN Environment and members of the Task Team to develop Terms of Reference and work plan of the Task Team including concrete deliverables;
- 3- Follow up of the measures of the Terms of Reference;
- 4- Report on progress to the next Senior Officials Meeting.