

The EMG Peer Review Process

Background

In the Rio+20 outcome document, “the Future We Want”, Member States called upon the UN system to integrate sustainable development across its work including by improving environmental management of its facilities and operations. The UN Secretary General and heads of agencies also expressed their determination to enhance sustainability of their management and operation including implementation of the Secretary General’s Climate Neutral Strategy approved in 2007 to achieve climate neutrality by 2020. As a result, and with the support of the Environment Management Group and the UN Environment Sustainable UN Facility, agencies have engaged individually and collectively in a range of corporate environmental sustainability measures.

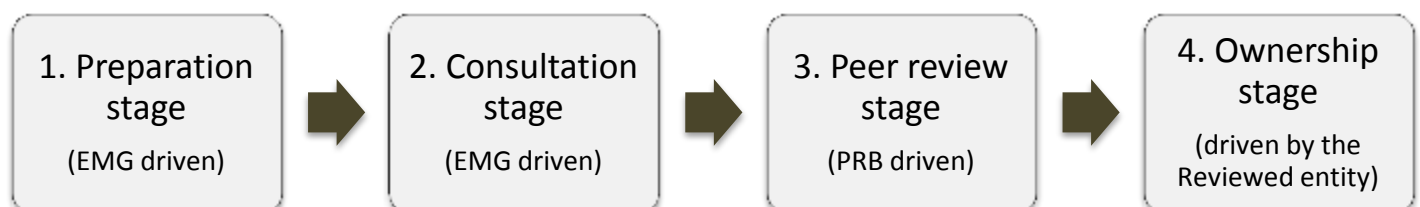
The EMG Peer Review aims to support agencies in setting baseline assessments of their environmental management by identifying achievements made, usefulness of the tools and effectiveness of their efforts, identifying gaps and challenges as well as goals and measures for further improvement. The review uses data and indicators, and refers to policy objectives which are then compiled in a peer review report and submitted to the reviewed agency for further follow up, and implementation.

UNIDO, on behalf of UN entities based in the Vienna International Centre, WMO and UN Environment were the first three volunteers for the peer-reviews during the pilot phase in 2013-2014. The IMF was then peer reviewed in 2015. In 2016-2017 the peer review concept is being replicated at UN agencies’ field-level work, including the field offices of WFP, UNOPS, UNDP and UNRWA Headquarters in Amman, Jordan.

Depending on the needs of UN agencies, peer reviews have either served as a baseline assessment for reviewing and planning further sustainability efforts and achievements or in developing new corporate policy or strategy on the environment. The principles that govern the EMG Peer Review Process include mutual trust among peers, voluntary participation, factual evidence, independent assessment and non-binding recommendations, which differentiates the process from traditional environmental and energy audits.

Peer Review Phases

Each Peer Review consists of 4 stages. The Process is driven by the EMG Secretariat, the Peer Review Team, the Peer Review Body (PRB), and the entity under review. Typically the process develops over a year through the following stages:



Preparation Stage

The preparation stage relies on general clarification of the Peer Review Process to be undertaken, agreed between the EMG Secretariat and the entity to be reviewed. In addition to this, work is undertaken around available information and data, the development of objectives (aims, goals, targets; formal and declarative); a survey from the EMG Secretariat to the reviewed entity is also due for completion.

1) FACT FINDING AND AGREEMENT WITH THE REVIEWED AGENCY

The EMG Secretariat holds a fact finding visit/meeting with the reviewed agency where the scope, issues, parameters, and modalities of the review are defined and agreed. An agency focal point and work plan for implementation are also identified. Discussion on the scope determines which and how many buildings and facilities are to be reviewed; in which and how many locations. Review issues depend on the needs and concerns of the reviewed agency. So far, typical review issues included but have not been limited to the following:

Greenhouse gases related to buildings and facilities	Greenhouse gases related to air travel
Waste management at facilities	Water management at facilities
ICT and the greening of meetings	Sustainable procurement
Staff awareness, involvement and training	Communication and outreach

The reviewed agency is encouraged to tailor its selection to the environmental aspects most related to their activities and those most beneficial to them. An agreement on the costs of the Peer Review is then established. The typical costs of the review will vary from agency to agency depending on:

The size of the entity/facility
The distance and accessibility of the locations
The capacity of the Peer Reviewers to undertake the review(s)
The number of locations being reviewed
The capacity of the reviewed entity to provide essential data

2) CONVENING OF THE PEER REVIEWING TEAM

UN agencies, preferably those with similar mandates or facilities, will be invited to attend the peer review process taking into account required expertise for the particular review. Typically, a reviewing team comprises interested UN agencies, local authorities hosting UN facilities, two technical consultants hired by the EMG Secretariat, and a peer review coordinator from the EMG Secretariat. In previous reviews, Canton of Geneva, OECD, UN Habitat, UNIDO, UN Environment, UPU, WFP, WMO, UNICEF, UNOPS and World Bank have been involved. Peer Reviewers attend the review at their own costs in light of the collaborative and reciprocal spirit of this process.

3) DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The reviewed agency will be asked to provide basic data by completing a questionnaire and survey relating to the identified themes of the review to lay the foundation of the Peer Review Report. The data will be analysed by the technical consultants as a basis for the site visit, verification, and completion of the data during the site visit.

Consultation Stage

The consultation stage involves a recommended on-site visit undertaken by the chosen reviewing team, alongside the consultation of relevant officials and staff of the reviewed entity. The preparation of a Draft Peer Review Report including draft conclusions and recommendations is then undertaken, with transmission to all members well in advance of the proposed Peer Review Body Meeting.

4) SITE VISIT AND DRAFTING THE PEER REVIEW REPORT

A site visit is undertaken which normally consists of a 3 or 4-day visit of buildings and facilities at the reviewed entity, involving the review team: the consultant(s), a representative from the EMG Secretariat and from the reviewed entity. The visit aims to gather useful information on corporate environmental management of these buildings and facilities to formulate conclusions and recommendations in the Peer Review Report. Drafting of the Report, after data collection, analysis and the site visit is conducted by the consultant(s) for the sections specifically concerning technical aspects and relating directly to data collection. The report is then opened to the peer review stage and is typically composed of an executive summary, short presentation of the buildings and facilities/operations' scope, status of the reviewed themes, achievements made, challenges faced and recommendations for improvement.

Peer Review Stage

This stage is undertaken by the Peer Review Body, which for every review includes an exchange among peers and the review and revision of draft conclusions and recommendations. The PRB Meeting then approves final non-binding conclusions and recommendations on both the achievements and the areas for progress, to be transmitted to the Senior Officials' Meeting of the EMG and likewise to top officials of the reviewed entity.

4) SHARING DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMENTS WITH THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

Draft conclusions and recommendations, and responses to the collected data are reviewed by the Peer Review team for any comments. Sections in the report which may require input by representatives of the reviewed entity and the EMG Secretariat are duly completed, before the report is discussed in the PRB meeting.

5) PEER REVIEW BODY MEETING TO DISCUSS THE REPORT

The PRB meeting represents the concluding stage of the Peer Review Process, prior to finalisation and submission to the EMG Senior Officials. The PRB meeting is coordinated by the EMG Secretariat; including presentations by consultant(s) involved and representatives from the reviewed entity. Conclusions and recommendations are discussed and final comments are incorporated. The meeting often ends with discussion on the possible next steps for the peer review, e.g. its communication to senior management and staff, and general awareness etc.

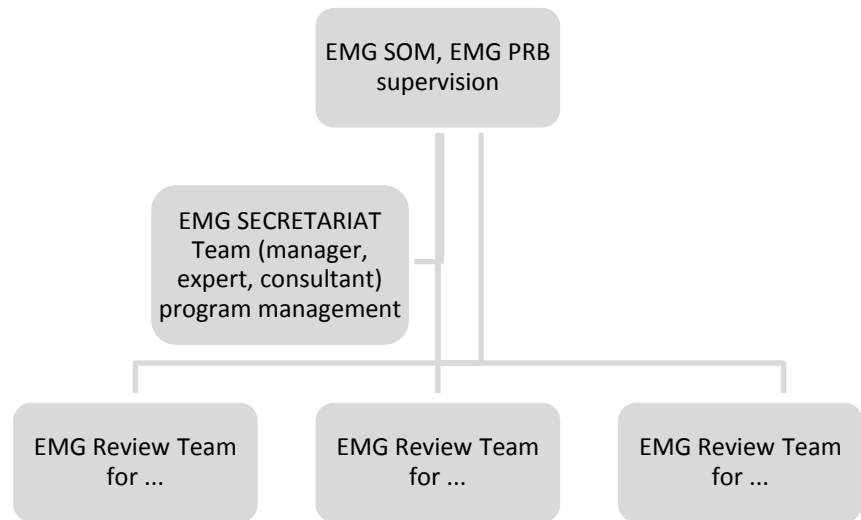
6) FINALIZATION OF THE PEER REVIEW REPORT AND SUBMISSION OF REPORT TO THE EMG SENIOR OFFICIALS AND THE REVIEWED AGENCY

The Peer Review report is finalised and signed-off, along with a forward by the relevant senior management of the reviewed entity. The report is then submitted to the reviewed entity, and to the Senior Officials' Meeting of the EMG.

Ownership Stage

The release and ownership stage is driven by the reviewed entity with support of the EMG Secretariat. Chiefly, this stage includes a presentation to and by top officials, staff involvement, media releases on appropriate websites and relationships with local, national and international press – alongside any expected follow-up.

Peer Review Structure



Benefits of the Peer Review Process

A basis for further improvement in environmental performance:

- The Peer Review Process can act effectively as a pre-cursor for assigning environmental, social, and economic sustainability objectives to an agency's future corporate sustainability and environmental management policy.
- A Peer Review of an agency can set the mechanisms in place for fostering continual improvement and implementing related international standards such as Environmental Management System ISO 14001.

A voluntary and non-obligatory Process:

- The Peer Review Process is a resource efficient tool which provides voluntary participants with non-obligatory recommendations and the sharing of best practices.
- Those involved in the Process become exposed to an atmosphere of transparency and accountability, consistency and coherence, and credibility and exemplarity.

A unique mutual learning experience:

- The process of sharing experience on best practices is an important capacity building instrument, for: i) the entity under review, ii) the entities participating in the process as specific reviewer entities, and iii) the entities simply participating in the respective Peer Review Body.
- This unique mutual learning experience, based on best practices and enhanced individual/collective environmental performance, helps replace more isolated capacity building efforts.
- The peer nature of this process allows a cost-effective method for other involved agencies to gather best practices and examples for their own implementation.

A Process in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- The EMG Peer Review mechanism is a way to strengthen the UN leadership role and UN support to its Member States in furthering the global sustainability agenda. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Secretary General's determination to have the UN lead by example and maintain sustainability as a top priority – a step forward towards "walking the talk".