

# Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework in the United Nations System

## INTERIM GUIDE



UNITED NATIONS

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# Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework in the United Nations System

Conducting a situational assessment  
and gap analysis at the level of individual UN entities

## **INTERIM GUIDE**

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP



**UNITED NATIONS**

Geneva, 2014



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# FOREWORD

In 2012, Members of the UN Environment Management Group prepared a Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system. The Framework proposed a conceptual structure for the pursuit of sustainability measures in UN entities at the policy, program and operational levels.

The UN now faces the challenge of bringing the Sustainability Framework into full and effective implementation, so that all UN entities can advance individually and collectively towards mainstreaming sustainability in their activities.

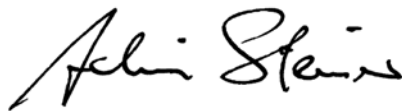
This Interim Guide is prepared through the Consultative Process of the Environment Management Group as a basic tool to help the UN entities to start implementing the Framework.

The Guide is based on the entities' current practices for incorporating, implementing and reporting on sustainability measures, and aims to provide an understanding of the minimum requirements and essential actions needed to move towards sustainability in each institution.

Enhancing sustainability is an iterative and incremental process of change that requires real and informed commitment by top management. To enable such an undertaking, it is important that managers understand what the Framework aims to achieve and the operational implications of the related measures. This guide is intended to facilitate that process.

This Interim Guide will be revised and improved, drawing on additional lessons learned as the Framework is implemented and the UN entities gain experience in integrating sustainability measures into their policy work and programmatic activities.

I hope this Guide will assist the UN family in taking practical steps towards implementing the Sustainability Framework, and that the entities will share lessons learned with their peers to enhance mainstreaming sustainable development in our organizations.



Achim Steiner

Chairman, Environment Management  
Group and Executive Director,  
United Nations Environment Programme



# INTRODUCTION

## VISION

The environmental and social sustainability of the United Nations is enhanced, thereby contributing to its mission to promote and protect human well-being in line with internationally agreed declarations, conventions, standards and covenants.<sup>1</sup>

## CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

In June 2012, at the RIO+20 UN Global Conference on Sustainable Development, world leaders re-affirmed that sustainable development is the only viable solution for addressing the world's growing environmental, social and economic problems.

A new spirit of collective responsibility emerged, which included a call for greater accountability and transparency about progress made in achieving sustainable development.<sup>2</sup> This call was extended to include the international development community and the UN system.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the UN's commitment to support nationally-owned sustainable development results, entities across the system are committed to internalizing the principles they stand for, leading by example and maintaining credibility as a partner in sustainable development. A key element of this is enhancing the environmental and social sustainability of the UN's activities. This is about strengthening institutional effectiveness of each UN entity to deliver on existing mandates and the achievement of results that are sustainable. It is about good business.

In September 2012, the Senior Officials of the Environment Management Group (EMG), endorsed the "Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System". This framework, hereafter referred to as the Sustainability Framework, provides a basic architecture for integrating environmental and social sustainability measures into policies, programmes, and operations of the UN. It provides recommendations about measures to be taken at the individual entities level as well as across the UN-system. Figure 1 provides an overview of the main elements of the Sustainability Framework.

1. *Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System*, UN Environment Management Group, 2012. <http://www.unemg.org/index.php/a-framework-for-advancing-environmental-and-social-sustainability-in-the-un-system>
2. *A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*. Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013). New York: United Nations.
3. Recommendation # 31 in the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability Report (2012). *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing*. New York: United Nations.



It is clear that in order to implement the Sustainability Framework and environmental and social measures proposed within, an iterative and incremental process of change will be required. Existing experiences and structures in place across the UN entities to support the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures vary widely. While some entities may be further along than others, it is evident – based on findings from a review conducted as part of the development of the Sustainability Framework – that no entities will be starting this process from scratch. It is also clear that a “one-size-fits-all” approach will not be useful in promoting the implementation of the Sustainability Framework. The variance in mandates, cultures, and operational models makes this both undesirable and impractical.

It is also evident that in order for entities to commit to and move forward with the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures, there needs to be a clearer understanding of associated financial, institutional and potentially political implications.

This guide was developed in order to clarify and address some of these issues and to help entities across the UN system learn from each other’s experiences in advancing environmental and social sustainability.

## FIGURE 1: Entity level entry points for implementing environmental and social sustainability measures

### 1. Policy/Strategy

Environmental and social considerations are considered as part of the development of all entity policies and strategies, including those specific to the entities internal operations as well as those that reflect the entities wider strategic priorities and thematic areas of focus.

*Illustrative example: The mainstreaming of gender, human rights based approach and environmental sustainability (the 3 normative common country programming principles) into an agency's country cooperation strategy or programme.*

### 2. Programmes/Projects

Environmental and social considerations are systematically integrated in all programme and project cycles, including as part of planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

*Illustrative example: Screening of project proposals for potential environmental and social impacts.*

### 3. Facilities/Operations

Procedures and practices integrate environmental and social considerations into the UN's own management practices and support systems for operations, premises, travel, procurement, and use of information technology.

*Illustrative example: Greening office facilities to reduce carbon footprint and the use of score cards in procurement activities to monitor management practices toward environmental and social sustainability.<sup>4</sup>*

## SCOPE, AUDIENCE AND INTENDED PURPOSE

The overarching aim of this guide is to support the implementation of the Sustainability Framework. Its specific objectives are to raise awareness about environmental and social sustainability measures that can be adopted at the individual entity level, and to sensitize staff about the implications of and options for applying them.

The primary audience is technical and/or management level officers who would typically be responsible for developing and implementing environmental and social sustainability systems at the levels of policies/strategies, programmes/projects, or facilities/operations.

4. Adapted from "A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN", 2012, UN, Geneva

The guide does not prescribe the use of particular tools or systems for use at each entry point as these will, by necessity, be context specific. Rather it aims to build an overall understanding about enabling conditions needed to support the implementation of the Sustainability Framework. Where appropriate and relevant, case studies and illustrative examples are used routinely throughout the text to build on existing practice across the UN system.

Part 1 of the guide defines a set of minimum essential building blocks needed to support the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures in any given context. In Part 2, entities are provided with guidance about how to undertake an internal self-assessment that will help them better understand which of those building blocks are already in place, and where further inputs may be needed. The final section, Part 3, provides guidance about what to do following the self-assessment including where and how to fit this work into a wider process of change.

While it is understood that sustainable development will only be realized through actions in all three inter-related domains: environmental, social and economic; the content of the guide is primarily focused on supporting the uptake of environmental and social sustainability measures. This is in part a reflection of the fact that instruments to address the economic sustainability of UN activities are not clearly defined or applicable in ways that are easily related to instruments used for environmental and social sustainability. That said, environmental and social standards aim to complement existing fiduciary standards. The Drafting Group also noted that issues related to economic sustainability such as inequalities, fiscal regulations, subsidies, government incentives and disincentives, and trade issues that can affect sustainable livelihoods, if relevant, should be analysed and incorporated in any process that aims to protect people and the planet. With this in mind, it is recognized that the Sustainability Framework can provide a key contribution to the broader commitment made at Rio+20 to mainstream the three dimensions of sustainable development across the operational activities of the UN system.



**PART**

**1**

**MINIMUM ESSENTIAL  
BUILDING BLOCKS**

# PART 1 - Minimum essential building blocks

Part 1 provides an in-depth overview of the five minimum essential building blocks needed in a given entity context to support the implementation of the Sustainability Framework. These are shown in Table 1, along with a description of their relevance to the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures, and potential resource implications. In the sections that follow, more detail is provided about each. Example tools, systems and approaches taken by UN entities are also included as relevant.

It is understood that each entity will design and institutionalize these building blocks in ways most suited to their respective organizational context. Therefore, the approach taken here is to provide an overview of essential ingredients needed within each of those building blocks.

**TABLE 1: Minimum essential building blocks to support the implementation of the Sustainability Framework**

Minimum essential building block	Importance and role vis-à-vis implementation of the Sustainability Framework	Inputs and resource implications
<b>1. Corporate commitment</b>	This establishes the requirement and/or organizational commitment to address environmental and social sustainability issues. It sets the basis for what the organization will be held accountable for.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate commitments to a set of environmental and social sustainability principles and/or targets related to its own work.</li> <li>• Organizational buy-in (at all levels).</li> </ul>
<b>2. Performance/quality standards</b>	These are standards that must be met in order to deliver on the overarching commitment to environmental and social sustainability. For instance, in the context of programmes and projects, performance/quality standards provide the benchmarks for issues such as biodiversity, climate change, cultural heritage, gender, or human rights that need to be taken into consideration and addressed as part of the implementation of those programmes and projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A set of clearly defined performance standards or quality criteria that are relevant (and implementable) to the work of the particular entity.</li> <li>• Policy or regulation that mandates the application of the standards (could be included in the corporate commitment as referred to above).</li> </ul>

Minimum essential building block	Importance and role vis-à-vis implementation of the Sustainability Framework	Inputs and resource implications
<b>3. Operational procedures</b>	<p>These are the specific processes that will be used to implement environmental and social sustainability measures at the various entry points, e.g. policy, project, or facility.</p> <p>Operational procedures outline steps in the process, inputs and outputs needed, roles and responsibilities, etc.</p> <p>Operational procedures are crucial because they define the regulatory framework within which environmental and social sustainability measures will be implemented as well as define the overall management structures needed to oversee it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated structures and human resources, e.g. for oversight.</li> <li>• Management tools, templates, workflow management systems, including monitoring and reporting systems.</li> <li>• On-going training and capacity development for staff.</li> <li>• Process of regular review and evaluation.</li> <li>• Technical material and guidance to support implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability and transparency</b>	<p>In this context, accountability is in relation to the delivery of corporate commitments made with respect to environmental and social sustainability. Included within this is the notion of an entity being held into account for complying with its own operational procedures and performance standards. Accountability is both internal (to internal stakeholders and governing bodies) as well as external (to donors, partners, the general public, and beneficiaries, etc.) and is usually facilitated/reinforced by/through regular engagement with key stakeholders.</p> <p>Transparency is a precondition for monitoring and measuring accountability. Therefore, ensuring access to information and disclosure of information are key aspects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal compliance and accountability oversight and incentives, including audits.</li> <li>• An access to information policy and/or other public information disclosure mechanism.</li> <li>• Independent evaluation and oversight mechanism.</li> <li>• Provisions and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and consultation, including with beneficiaries of development assistance.</li> <li>• Internal and/or external complaints mechanism and process.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems</b>	<p>To ensure a process for institutional learning and accountability. Monitoring and evaluation include a range of related activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular/routine reporting on programmes, projects or activity areas against environmental and social sustainability management targets.</li> <li>• Organization-wide or corporate sustainability reporting (e.g. procurement, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions).</li> <li>• Periodic evaluations, for example to assess candour and reliability of monitoring reports; effectiveness and efficiency of the environmental and social sustainability (ESS) system in the organization; and feedbacks from the stakeholders on ESS implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and measurable environmental and social sustainability targets and indicators.</li> <li>• Monitoring and reporting mechanisms for projects, programmes, etc.</li> <li>• Dedicated and designated structures and human resources.</li> </ul>

## CORPORATE COMMITMENT

UN entities need to establish their mandate for the integration of environmental and social sustainability measures across their activities. This can come from their governing bodies, inter-governmental processes, responses to independent evaluations, inter-agency and system-wide commitments. For example, at the Rio+20 Conference, Member States called for further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system and requested the Secretary General to report on the progress the UN has made.

### Extract from the Report of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012)

*“We call for the further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system, and request the Secretary General to report to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on the progress made in this regard” (para. 93). ... “We invite the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations development system to consider appropriate measures for integrating the social, economic and environmental dimensions across the operational activities of the United Nations system” (para. 94).<sup>5</sup>*

An example of an inter-agency mandate is the commitment of the members of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to the three normative principles of the human rights based approach, gender equality and environmental sustainability. These principles guide UN country teams in their analysis, preparation and implementation of country work programmes as defined by the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

5. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E).



## Example of inter-agency mandate

### UNDG Country Programming Principles:

- **Human rights-based approach** – Human rights carry normative value as a set of universally agreed values, standards and principles.
- **Gender equality** – Achieving gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination are at the heart of a human rights-based approach.
- **Environmental sustainability** – Sustainable development, including the environmental dimension, has been a guiding policy of the UN since 1992.
- **Results-based management** – Results-based management is a strategic management approach used to plan, cost, implement, monitor and measure the changes from management.
- **Capacity development** – Capacity development and ownership of national development strategies are essential for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.

The above principles include: (i) three normative principles (i.e. human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability) that are universal in nature, grounded in internationally-agreed development goals and treaties, and fundamentally relevant to all government-UN cooperation efforts<sup>6</sup>; and (ii) two enabling principles (i.e. results-based management and capacity development) that provide the means to make the normative principles operational.<sup>7</sup>

Another example of inter-agency mandate is the endorsement of the Sustainability Framework by the Senior Official of the Environment Management Group.

## Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN

The **Framework** for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability aims at internalizing sustainability principles into UN policies, programmes and management in a systematic and coherent manner within the UN system. The Sustainability Framework provides a holistic view of the UN system's work, from policy conception through programme implementation and internal operations management, thereby building a broad base of knowledge for informed decision-making. The Sustainability Framework looks to build on the internationally agreed sustainability norms and principles of the last 30 years by adapting best practices in environmental and social assessment procedures and management to UN system activities. It proposes:

- 1) a common vision, rationale and objective;
- 2) individual actions to be taken by each UN entity to internalize environmental and social sustainability measures; and
- 3) collective actions for the system to undertake, such as a support and knowledge sharing function, minimum requirements, and a centralized reporting structure.<sup>8</sup>

6. The three normative UNDG principles are very similar to the core values described in the text above and may serve as the basis for more entity-specific principles.

7. <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=220>

8. <http://www.unemg.org/index.php/a-framework-for-advancing-environmental-and-social-sustainability-in-the-un-system>

The ten principles adopted by the UN Global Compact, also provide an example, addressing human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption issues.<sup>9</sup> There is also a set of Principles for Responsible Investment developed by an international group of institutional investors convened by the UN Secretary-General. These six principles incorporate environmental, social and corporate governance issues into investment practices and reflect their increasing relevance to corporate governance.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the mandate clearly exists for the UN system but this often needs to be bolstered further by a strong corporate commitment at the highest levels of each UN entity. A corporate commitment related to the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures can take many forms. For instance, it could be integrated as a core commitment in the respective entity's overall mandate, charter or strategic frameworks. For example, compliance with environmental and social standards has been included in the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of UNDP's Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and the charter of UNDP's Office of Audits and Investigations. Other examples of commitments reflected in a high-level environmental and social sustainability strategy or policy are:

- IFAD's corporate commitment is reflected in its Environmental and Natural Resources Management Policy (2010).<sup>11</sup>
- DPKO's corporate commitment is reflected in its Environmental Policy (2009) and Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions (2010).<sup>12</sup>
- UNEP demonstrated its policy support in the Environmental, Social and Economic Sustainability Framework (to be launched in late 2014).
- UNOPS' corporate commitment is reflected in its Strategic Plan 2014-2017, in which UNOPS commits to applying the principles of sustainability in its operations and establishes a "Sustainability Programme" to coordinate and drive a number of related initiatives.<sup>13</sup>

An important aspect of corporate commitment is that it drives the management systems and the review processes. For example, the "UNOPS policy on sustainable infrastructure"<sup>14</sup>, published in 2012, drives the UNOPS Infrastructure Design Review Process, the Design Manuals, the infrastructure projects, the environmental management systems (ISO 14001 certified), the process of achieving OHSAS 18001 certification and so on.

9. <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/>

10. <http://www.unpri.org/>

11. [http://www.ifad.org/climate/policy/enrm\\_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/climate/policy/enrm_e.pdf)

12. <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/environment/approach.shtml>

13. <https://www.unops.org/english/About/multimedia/Pages/Strategic-Plan.aspx>

14. [https://www.unops.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/Multimedia/Rio/unops\\_policy\\_for\\_sustainable\\_infrastructure.pdf](https://www.unops.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/Multimedia/Rio/unops_policy_for_sustainable_infrastructure.pdf)

Having a corporate mandate and commitment related to the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures is potentially the most important of all of the minimum essential building blocks. Not only does this establish the requirement to address environmental and social sustainability issues at the various levels of activity and operation of the respective UN entity, it also often provides justification for allocating the necessary resources to support the delivery of those sustainability commitments.

In many instances, the corporate commitment to environmental and social sustainability will also include reference to a set of core values and/or principles that underpin the respective entity's commitment to sustainability. Many of these will be derived from existing UN conventions and commitments, for example in relation to human rights, labour, conservation, and cultural heritage.

In some cases, entity may develop and align their core values and principles on sustainability using different "framings". For example, some may adopt a risk management framing in which the statement and articulation of sustainability principles might support the use of the Precautionary Principle<sup>15</sup>, or seek to "do no harm". In other instances, sustainability principles may be articulated in relation to organization effectiveness. UNDP, for example, has included environmental and social sustainability as one of seven quality criteria for programming (for further details see the example of performance standard page 18).

There is no right or wrong approach, provided that there are principles and/or corporate values on environmental and social sustainability, that are clear and reflective of the entity's overall corporate commitment vis-à-vis its internal contribution to sustainable development.

## PERFORMANCE/QUALITY STANDARDS

Once a clear mandate and commitment is established, each UN entity will need to articulate its specific obligations to deliver on that commitment given its overall mandate and modes of operation.

Performance or quality standards define the criteria that must be met/achieved with respect to environmental and social sustainability. Typically, these would define the threshold values and/or benchmarks against which proposed policies, projects or activities would be measured. For example, if there is a clear corporate commitment to the protection of biodiversity, the standard would describe the expected measures to be taken with respect to the consideration of biodiversity issues, including actions expected at specific points in time of a programme or project, for example, as part of planning, implementation and monitoring and reporting activities. If there are

15. The 1998 Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle summarizes the principle this way: "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically." <http://www.sehn.org/wing.html>

partners involved in the delivery of specific activities, the performance standards would also make clear the entity's expectations about responsibilities of each party vis-à-vis the delivery of environmental and social sustainability commitments.

Performance and quality standards are commonly applied at the level of programmes and projects, using supporting systems often referred to as environmental and social safeguards. See box below for a description of the way in which a performance standard might be triggered at the project level, and the types of actions that might be required to ensure relevant issues are adequately addressed.

### Example of performance standard

**UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards** (SES – endorsed in June 2014) are embedded in UNDP's Quality Assurance Framework as one of 7 key quality criteria. The proposed SES consist of three sections: the Overarching Policy and Principles, a Policy Delivery Process, and seven project-level Standards. The Overarching Policy and Principles reflect UNDP's commitments to promote a Human-Rights-based Approach to Development Programming, Gender Equality, and Environmental Sustainability. Seven project-level standards are then articulated. The project-level Standards are risk-based and relevant depending on a project's potential risks and impacts. In addition, crosscutting requirements of the Policy Delivery Process are specified. These include (i) assessment and management of social and environmental risks, (ii) stakeholder engagement and dispute resolution, (iii) access to information, and (iv) monitoring, reporting and compliance.<sup>16</sup>

Performance or quality standards may also be applied to activities undertaken in the policy/strategy domain as well as in facilities and operations management. For example, a performance standard on climate change might require that all policies and strategies are screened so as to identify opportunities to mainstream climate resilience. The same performance standard on climate change might also require that all tenders for procured goods and services, as relevant, include information about associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Entities may choose to elaborate a set of standards that cut across the three entry points or elaborate specific standards for each.

The most important characteristic of performance or quality standards is that they define organizational requirements needed to identify and manage environmental and social sustainability issues.

16. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Social-and-Environmental-Policies-and-Procedures/UNDP%20Social%20and%20Environmental%20Standards-14%20July%202014.pdf>

## OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

Operational procedures are the specific processes, tools, resources and instruments needed to “operationalize” environmental and social sustainability commitments and performance/quality standards. They define management and logistical arrangements, including roles and responsibilities for the various actions and inputs taken as part of the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures.

Operational procedures and processes will vary depending on the entry point used for the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures, and depending on the nature of the activity sustainability measures are being applied to. For example, project-level impact assessment instruments would not necessarily be appropriate for use at the programme or policy level where strategic level assessment would be relevant. Similarly, environmental management systems set up to promote sustainable procurement practices may not be readily compatible with environmental and social risk management systems set up for projects.

However, the three entry points are not mutually exclusive and there are often overlaps and linkages that need to be considered when elaborating environmental and social sustainability procedures (e.g. procurement often takes place within the context of a project or assessment).

**GRAPH 1: Entry points for implementing environmental and social sustainability measures**

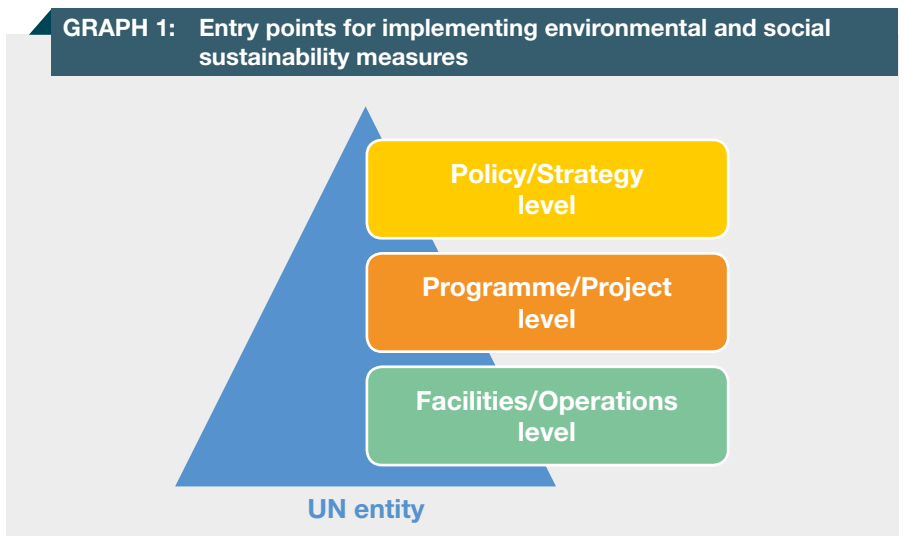


Table 2 contains a list of sample operational procedures used within the UN system to facilitate the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures at each of the three entry points outlined in the Sustainability Framework.

**TABLE 2: Sample operational procedures being used by UN entities**

Entry point as defined in the Sustainability Framework	Sample operational procedure
1. Policy/Strategy level	<p><b>Gender mainstreaming procedure</b> which defines how gender issues are to be considered as part of the process of developing new organizational policies and strategies.</p>
2. Programme/ Project level	<p><b>Environmental and Social Assessment Procedure</b> – IFAD (2009) – This procedure addresses environmental and social assessment requirements for projects, including, in relation to the screening of proposals, development and implementation of environmental management plans, and related monitoring and reporting requirements. Requirements processes concerning stakeholder engagement are also articulated here.<sup>17</sup></p> <p><b>Environmental and Social Screening Procedure</b> - UNDP (2012, being updated in 2014) - This addresses processes to be followed in relation to the screening and initial review of project proposals and outlines assessment and management requirements for various categories of projects.<sup>18</sup></p> <p><b>FAO's Environmental Impact Assessment</b> (2012) - Guidelines for FAO Field Projects.<sup>19</sup></p> <p><b>WHO Environmental Management Procedure</b> (2010) – currently being used on a pilot basis to integrate environmental and social considerations into WHO projects.</p> <p><b>UNOPS Environmental Management System for infrastructure projects</b> (2013) – process and tools to undertake environmental and social screening, environmental and social appraisal, and to develop and implement environmental management plans for infrastructure projects. This system has been ISO14001 certified and is mandatory for all infrastructure projects implemented in UNOPS since January 2013.<sup>20</sup></p> <p><b>UNOPS Sustainability Marker</b> is a decision support mechanism embedded in the life cycle of projects. It is used to help identify opportunities where projects might be improved by bringing sustainability themes into project design and planning. UNOPS is currently rolling out this approach across all of its offices and is planning on making the method and tools available freely.<sup>21</sup></p> <p><b>The Buying for a better world</b> (2011) tool kit is a guide on Sustainable Procurement for the UN system indicating a series of tools for a greener and more socially responsible procurement for facilities and programmes developed by SUN, UNEP, UNOPS, and ITC ILO for the HLCM.<sup>22</sup></p>

17. <http://www.ifad.org/gbdocs/eb/96/e/EB-2009-96-R-7.pdf>

18. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/operations1/environmental-and-social-screening-procedure-for-UNDP-projects.html>

19. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2802e/i2802e.pdf>

20. [https://www.unops.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/Multimedia/Rio/unops\\_policy\\_for\\_sustainable\\_infrastructure.pdf](https://www.unops.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/Multimedia/Rio/unops_policy_for_sustainable_infrastructure.pdf)

21. To learn more about the UNOPS Sustainability Marker Initiative please contact your local UNOPS office. The Marker is planned to be available for free under a General Public License arrangement.

22. [http://www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Portals/24147/scp/sun/facility/reduce/procurement/PDFs/BFABW\\_Final\\_web.pdf](http://www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Portals/24147/scp/sun/facility/reduce/procurement/PDFs/BFABW_Final_web.pdf)

Entry point as defined in the Sustainability Framework	Sample operational procedure
3. Facilities/ Operations level	<p><b>Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions</b> requesting field missions to implement an EMS –UNEP-DPKO (2009).<sup>23</sup></p> <p><b>Environmental Management System Milestones Framework (2014):</b> step by step guidance on the implementation of EMS produced by the Issue Management Group (IMG) on environmental sustainability management.<sup>24</sup></p> <p><b>Climate friendly buildings and offices:</b> A practical Guide (SUN, UNEP) Issue Management Group on environmental management Sustainable events tools consisting of: ICAO Green meetings calculator, UNEP, UNON IAMLADP green events and green meeting guides containing a specific definition of events and step by step guidance (checklist) on how to organise a more sustainable event.<sup>25</sup></p>

Key issues to consider with respect to operational procedures include the following:

- The scope of expected actions, inputs and outputs required at each point in the process should be clearly defined and universally understood.
- Roles and responsibilities of different actors involved in the implementation of the activities should be clearly defined, including in cases where unplanned or unforeseen issues are identified, such as in the event that an external complaint is registered or in an emergency situation where contingency measures may be needed.
- Human and financial resources needed to ensure the procedures are implemented all the way through.

## MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Accountability in a UN entity begins with the clear commitment and statement of values or principles and explicit assignment of responsibilities and the authority to carry them out effectively. Accountability is both internal (to internal management and governing bodies) as well as external (to donors, partners, the general public, and beneficiaries, etc.) and is usually facilitated/reinforced by/through regular engagement with key stakeholders.

23. [http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/EnvironmentPolicy\\_FINAL.pdf](http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/EnvironmentPolicy_FINAL.pdf)

24. *Environmental Management System Milestones Framework*. Unite Platform, February (2014)

25. [http://www.greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/A\\_summary\\_climate\\_friendly\\_buildings\\_%26\\_offices\\_a\\_practical\\_guide.pdf](http://www.greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/A_summary_climate_friendly_buildings_%26_offices_a_practical_guide.pdf)

In a sustainability context, UN entities are accountable for the delivery of corporate commitments made with respect to environmental and social sustainability. Included within this is the notion of an entity being held into account for complying with its own operational procedures and performance standards. In practical terms, this translates into assigning entity staff the responsibility and authority for carrying out, or ensuring compliance with, sustainability measures. Where the entity or staff members fail to execute or comply with sustainability measures or related processes and procedures set up to deliver them, they can be held accountable by the entity's governing body, staff, stakeholders or project beneficiaries. Incentives can also be used for enhancing accountability among entity staff, for example, by incorporating accountability into staff performance evaluations.

Transparency is a precondition for monitoring and measuring accountability. Therefore, ensuring access to information and disclosure of information are key aspects.

### Definitions of accountability and transparency

- **Accountability** is defined as “being answerable for decisions and activities to the organization’s governing bodies, legal authorities and, more broadly, its stakeholders”.
- **Transparency** is defined as “openness about decisions and activities that affect society, the economy and the environment, and willingness to communicate these in a clear, accurate, timely, honest and complete manner”.

International Standards Organization (ISO) 26000<sup>26</sup>

Accountability and transparency mechanisms used to enhance corporate sustainability are often comprised of several elements. Broadly these include:

- **Mechanisms to support meaningful stakeholder engagement as part of the planning and design of policies, programmes and projects**, including as appropriate, with persons and/or communities directly impacted by the proposed activities. The extent and depth of stakeholder engagement and consultation activities undertaken will normally be commensurate with the scale/complexity of environmental and social issues involved.
- **An access to information policy and/or other public information disclosure mechanism**. Ensuring open access to information about planning and decision making processes, and about results of monitoring and evaluation activities is a critical aspect of transparency, particularly to external stakeholders and constituencies.

26. [http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue\\_detail?csnumber=42546](http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=42546)



The nature and form of information disclosed, and circumstances under which this information is disclosed will also vary. The introduction of disclosure mechanisms is likely to be an incremental process, which will evolve as the particular entity establishes supporting structures and policies (e.g. clearance procedures) to accompany it.

Most of the multilateral finance institutions use a screening and classification scheme to determine the depth of environmental and social due diligence required for projects. The level of information disclosure required is then determined by the results of the classification, and is greater for environmentally and socially sensitive projects than for projects considered to have few and/or small associated impacts.

- **An independent evaluation and oversight mechanism**, that can be used to conduct ad hoc or periodic audits and evaluations related to the delivery of environmental and social sustainability commitments.

Most UN entities have existing independent evaluation and oversight bodies. Key characteristics of these bodies are that a) they are operationally independent from the organization within which they are nested and b) they have the necessary resources to carry out their mission and functions, which typically include audit, inspection, investigation and reporting. In some instances independent oversight and evaluation mechanisms may also include an ombudsperson function.

In a sustainability context, many of the above functions would be the same albeit focused more specifically on monitoring and measuring organizational performance in terms of environmental and social sustainability.

- **Internal and/or external complaints mechanism and process.** This is necessary for ensuring that potential grievances and complaints about the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures (and resulting entity actions taken to address them) are appropriately received, reviewed, and addressed. Typically such external grievance mechanisms are available to project-affected communities so that they are relevant at the programme/project level entry point. See below an example of a proposed Compliance Review and Dispute Resolution Process being considered in UNDP.

## Example of complaints mechanism

### UNDP's Proposed Compliance Review and Dispute Resolution Processes

UNDP is in the process of establishing: (i) a **compliance review** process to respond to claims that UNDP is not in compliance with applicable programme and project management environmental and social policies, and (ii) a **dispute resolution process** that ensures individuals, peoples, and communities affected by UNDP programmes and projects have access to appropriate dispute resolution procedures for hearing and addressing project-related disputes. To this end, UNDP has created a self-contained Social and Environmental Compliance Unit within UNDP's Office of Audit and Investigation and has clarified procedures, roles and responsibilities at country, regional and HQ levels to manage project-related grievances. UNDP's approach takes advantage of its current capacities and provides a cost-effective way to launch an interim phase of the compliance review and dispute resolution processes with the intention of scaling out across the organization in 2015.<sup>27</sup>

Key issues to consider with respect to the establishment of a grievance mechanism include the following:

- The need for clarity about how complaints and grievances will be registered, reviewed for eligibility and processed, i.e. what systems and resources should be used (e.g. if legal input is needed);
- What measures will be triggered in response to complaints, for example if there is a need for an independent evaluation, audit or investigation;
- How much information about the process of addressing the complaints will be disclosed, and in what format and duration; and
- What sort of communication and follow-up will occur with the complainant.

The multilateral finance institutions, such as the World Bank and regional development banks, have extensive experience with the use of the above types of accountability and transparency mechanisms for projects. Lessons learned and insights gleaned from their experiences can be valuable for informing the establishment of similar structures within the UN.

27. Additional information available here: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/social-and-environmental-sustainability-in-undp/feedback/>

# MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Monitoring and reporting on results of actions taken to address environmental and social sustainability considerations are part and parcel to ensuring accountability and transparency. This is necessary for demonstrating the respective entity's own contribution to sustainable development. It is also vital for fostering and informing organizational learning and development.

Monitoring and reporting activities are often undertaken at multiple levels using different (but hopefully related) systems and structures. At the organization-wide level, monitoring and reporting might focus on progress made in reaching specific sustainability goals or targets, such as climate neutrality. At the level of projects and programmes, it might focus on tracking the results of actions taken to address specific environmental and/or social issues such as labour conditions or gender equity. Periodic evaluations are often conducted to facilitate the documentation of lessons learned from specific projects, programs or initiatives or to ensure compliance with entity policies and practices. Monitoring, reporting, and evaluation systems can also be established in order to address a complaint or grievances captured through the entity's complaints mechanism.

## Example of a monitoring system

An example of a system wide monitoring system is the **UN GHG emissions inventory**, including formatted data files for data collection, an on-line office emissions calculator, the ICAO air travel emissions calculator and a web-portal where the data files can be uploaded and emissions results generated automatically. The inventory is managed by UNEP SUN and by ICAO for the travel component.<sup>28</sup>

Key issues to consider with respect to the establishment (or leveraging) of monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems for environmental and social sustainability include the following:

- Environmental and social sustainability performance indicators must be measurable, meaningful and relevant for the respective performance/quality standards of the entity.

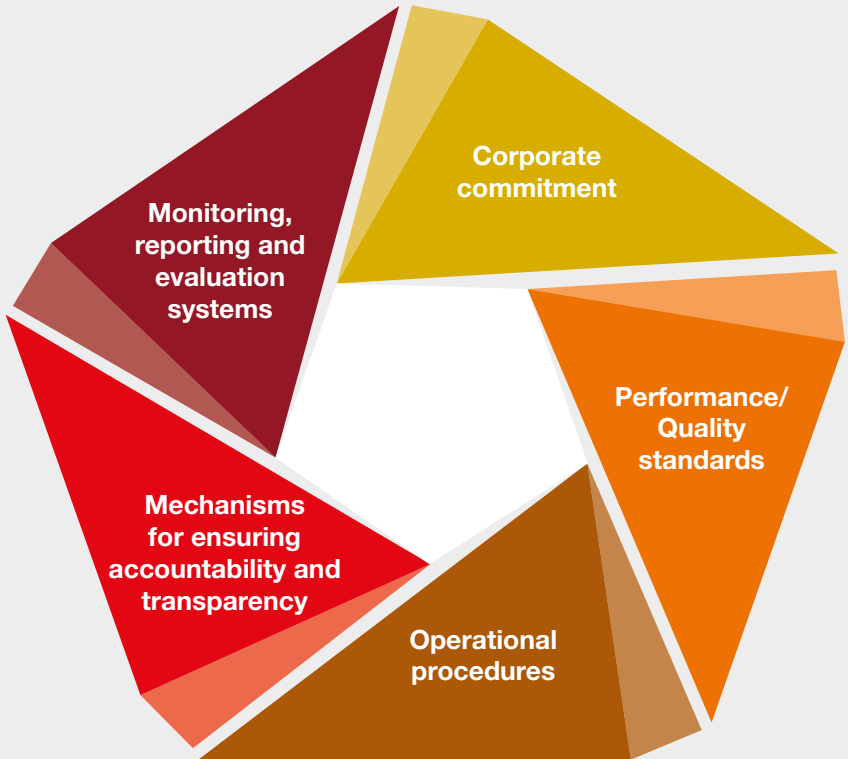
28. <http://www.greeningtheblue.org/sites/default/files/sequential6.3.14.pdf>

- Many entities already have elaborate monitoring and reporting structures in place. Some of these systems and structures may be suitable for monitoring sustainability performance at the policy/strategy, programme/project, and facility/operations level. Where possible, tracking compliance with environmental and social standards should be fully integrated into the existing monitoring and reporting systems and linked to overall organizational effectiveness and achievement of results.

One issue that entities might face when looking to integrate environmental and social performance measures into their existing monitoring and reporting structures, especially in relation to programme and project performance, is the fact that the planning and operational cycles for programmes and projects, particularly those funded from extra-budgetary resources, may not coincide with the organization's regular reporting cycles. If there are donor reporting requirements that fall outside of the entity's regular reporting cycle, separate reporting structures may be needed.

If the regular reporting structures measure performance at the programme level, this may not provide sufficient information about how specific environmental and social issues are being addressed as part of the implementation of activities. An important lesson learned by WHO, while piloting the use of environmental and social safeguards on a representative sample of its field-level projects, is the realization that monitoring and reporting is much more informative when conducted at the project level. If reporting only occurs at the programme level, where the combined actions and inputs of multiple projects are reflected, insights about how specific issues were addressed in specific settings and contexts will not be captured. Not only does this have the potential to dilute accountability, it is also not that useful from the point of view of organizational learning.

**GRAPH 2: Minimum essential building blocks**





**PART 2**

**UNDERSTANDING  
WHERE TO BEGIN**

## PART 2 - Understanding where to begin

Part 2 provides guidance about how to assess which of the minimum essential building blocks are already in place (or partly in place) and where there are gaps to be considered going forward. This step, formulated as a self-assessment process, will help entities better understand how the Sustainability Framework is relevant to their work and where and what actions will be needed to further support its implementation.

### ANCHORING A PROCESS AROUND THE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

The success of efforts made to promote the adoption and implementation of the Sustainability Framework at the individual entity level will depend on the extent to which it is seen to be of relevance to its work and immediate priorities. Following are some possible entry points or “drivers” of change that could be used as anchors for a process related to the potential implementation of the Sustainability Framework. Note that these are not presented in order of significance or priority.

**A: Internal drivers**, in addition to mandate and corporate commitment, are those agents of change that arise from within a UN entity or within the UN system itself to promote change on sustainability issues. These include:

- Senior managers who exercise leadership on sustainability issues in a top-down approach within a UN entity or across the UN system.

The UN Secretary General has been a key internal driver promoting environmental and social sustainability within the UN system. He articulated his commitment to UN sustainability measures when he endorsed the Sustainability Framework in 2012, stating that “internalizing environmental, social and economic sustainability practices can make us a more efficient, effective and responsible organization”.

- Committed staff who possess the right skill mix to provide leadership on sustainability issues from a bottom-up approach within a UN entity or across the UN system.

In many cases, rather than a top-down approach initiated by a corporate commitment to environmental and social sustainability, progress is initiated by individuals that can drive change from the bottom-up. The EMG focal points, who have participated in the consultative process developing the Sustainability Framework, have served as internal drivers within their entities, often playing leadership roles in internal sustainability issues. In these cases,



the partnerships and communication networks EMG provides have supported these internal drivers in their efforts. Other examples include dedicated staff members who initiate “green” activities or events within their entities, such as “Step-by Step” of UNEP to raise awareness about sustainability, such as organizing “bike to work” initiatives, office paper recycling campaigns, energy conservation measures, etc.

- Recommendations from internal evaluations of the environmental/social performance of UN entities.

Evaluation reports, system-wide or entity specific, often serve as effective internal drivers for sustainability within the UN system. For example, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report “Environmental Profile of the United Nations System Organizations”, provided an in-house review of the environmental management policies and practices of UN entities. Significantly, the report found that the UN system lacked a framework for integrated environmental management and recommended identifying common norms and standards for environmental management based on international best practices.

- Other business case or corporate governance initiatives that support sustainability, e.g. risk assessment/management, quality enhancement/assurance, etc.

The quality enhancement/quality assurance review processes that IFAD employs for its agricultural investment projects and programmes have served as effective internal drivers for ensuring consideration of environmental and social sustainability throughout the project identification, preparation and appraisal process. Similarly, broader processes within UNDP to strengthen quality assurance for programming helped to drive the process to strengthen social and environmental standards.

**B: External drivers**, in addition to external mandates mentioned previously, there are other agents of change that derive from sources outside the UN system to promote change on sustainability issues within the UN. These include:

- Stakeholders, communities, and civil society demand that UN entities have environmental and social safeguards in place in order to ensure that projects/programmes protect their interests.
- Donor organizations that require change or action on sustainability issues as a condition for receiving donor funding.

A number of bi-lateral donor organizations require sustainability measures as a condition for their support and thus serve as external drivers for UN entities using donor financing. Often this is driven by national legislation, regulations or requirements that apply to their overseas development assistance activities.

For example, all projects funded by the Canadian International Development Agency must comply with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and related provisions for environmental impact assessment. In the United States, Regulation 216 on Environmental Compliance, which is based on the National Environmental Protection Act of 1970, applies to all overseas development assistance, including on funds channeled through multilateral entities. Australia has similar requirements rooted in Section 160 of its Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Some donor entities have successfully included environmental performance criteria in their funding agreements with UN partners in order to satisfy their national requirements. This powerful driver of change has ensured that the sustainability measures adopted are institutionalized and used on other projects.

- Multilateral development funds that require minimum standards on sustainability issues as a condition for project financing.

There are several examples of external drivers among the multilateral development funds that require sustainability measures in the form of safeguard policies for fund-financed projects. For example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has proved to be an effective external driver for a number of UN entities that implement GEF-financed environmental projects (i.e. FAO, IFAD, UNDP, UNEP and UNIDO). The GEF “Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards” has been a significant driver on project/programme safeguard policies for these five GEF Implementing Agencies (see box below).

### Example 1 of external driver

#### **GEF Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards**

“The purpose of the policy is to support environmentally sustainable development by ensuring that the GEF and its Partner Agencies undertake sufficient efforts to avoid, minimize, mitigate, and where appropriate, offset any adverse impacts to people and the environment from GEF-financed operations”. The GEF minimum standards address: environmental policies and environment assessment, natural habitats, involuntary resettlement, indigenous peoples, pest management, physical and cultural resources, safety of dams, and accountability and grievance systems. The five UN entities that currently serve as GEF Implementing Agencies (and any UN entities that may do so in the future) will have to meet these minimum standards.<sup>29</sup>

29. GEF Policy on Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards at: [http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/C.40.10\\_GEF\\_Policies\\_on\\_Safeguards\\_and\\_Gender\\_April\\_26\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/C.40.10_GEF_Policies_on_Safeguards_and_Gender_April_26_2011.pdf)

Another example is the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) with its Common Approach to Environmental and Social Safeguards for Multiple Delivery Partners, which has been an effective driver of project/programme safeguards in UN entities that participate as Delivery Partners (DPs) in the FCPF Readiness Fund (see box below).

### Example 2 of external driver

#### Environmental and Social Safeguards in the FCPF Readiness Fund

The FCPF's Common Approach requires that delivery partners (DPs) participating in the FCPF Readiness Fund have certain environmental and social safeguards and associated policies and procedures. "The objective of these safeguards and associated policies and procedures is to prevent and mitigate undue harm to people and their environment and strive to develop benefits in the development process". The safeguards include: environmental assessment, natural habitats, forests, involuntary resettlement, indigenous peoples and physical and cultural resources. The Common Approach also requires adherence to four sets of guidelines on Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment, stakeholder engagement, disclosure of information and establishing grievance and redress mechanisms at the country level. Two UN entities currently serve as DPs for the FCPF Readiness Fund (i.e. FAO and UNDP) and they have demonstrated substantial equivalence with the Common Approach through their own policies and procedures.<sup>30</sup>

Other examples of multilateral development funds include:

- The **Green Climate Fund** (GCF), whose Board is expected to adopt best practice environmental and social safeguards that will be applied to all programmes and projects financed by the Fund. The GCF will also support the strengthening of capacity in recipient countries, where needed, to assist them in meeting the Fund's environmental and social safeguards.
- The **Adaptation Fund** has recently adopted an Environmental and Social Policy that requires Fund recipients to have social and environmental standards in place and make available a grievance mechanism for project-affected people.

As these last examples illustrate, environmental and social safeguards are increasingly being tied to climate finance, which relates not only to the ability of UN entities but also to that of countries to access climate finance. As a result, the UN has a role in supporting country systems that incorporate environmental and social safeguards in order to access climate finance from these multilateral funds.

30. [http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/forestcarbonpartnership.org/files/Documents/PDF/Nov2011/FCPF%20Readiness%20Fund%20Common%20Approach%20\\_Final\\_%2010-Aug-2011\\_Revised.pdf](http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/forestcarbonpartnership.org/files/Documents/PDF/Nov2011/FCPF%20Readiness%20Fund%20Common%20Approach%20_Final_%2010-Aug-2011_Revised.pdf)

- External evaluations of UN entity programmes or performance that raise questions about environmental and social sustainability.

There are several examples of external evaluations of UN entities that recommend measures to improve environmental and social sustainability.

In summary, these internal and external drivers can be used to help convince senior management to take action on appropriate sustainability measures in the context of the entity's mandate, activities, funding, etc. Identifying and understanding which of the above types of drivers are most relevant to your entity is a critical first step in the self-assessment process. This will not only inform and aid communications efforts, it will also make evident which actors/stakeholders have greatest potential incentive and ability to influence change needed to follow through with the implementation of the Sustainability Framework.

### GRAPH 3: Internal and external drivers



## CONDUCTING A SELF-ASSESSMENT

The result of the self-assessment will inform the development of future activities related to the implementation of the Sustainability Framework and define the starting point and/or baseline against which progress will be measured.

### • Approach/structure and expertise required

One of the main benefits of conducting a self-assessment is that it provides an opportunity to have structured dialogue with key internal stakeholders about what environmental and social sustainability measures might look like in a given entity setting.

Through this process, individuals will develop a better understanding of ways in which sustainability measures can be used in their work. Overall buy-in and support for these efforts will also likely be enhanced if participants in the process perceive that their views and interests have been adequately taken into account. For this reason, the dialogue and consultation activities conducted as part of the self-assessment are potentially just as important as results of the analysis.

Consultation activities can take many forms: lunchtime seminars (or other form of presentation commonly used in a given organization setting), workshops, small group discussions, key informant interviews, etc. A key goal of these consultations is to solicit views and inputs from all stakeholder groups likely to have a part in delivering environmental and social sustainability measures. Sample stakeholder groups include:

- Programme officers responsible for design of programmes and/or for monitoring and evaluation;
- Project managers responsible for the implementation of projects;
- Legal officers;
- Independent evaluation/audit officers;
- Technical and/or thematic specialists working in areas likely to have associated environmental and social considerations;
- Procurement and/or building management officers responsible for facilities management and operations;
- Custodians of the entities policies and procedures;
- Information technology team responsible for developing web-based systems and platforms for corporate reporting and tracking; and
- Communications specialists.

Ideally the self-assessment will be undertaken as a group exercise involving several representatives from the different stakeholder groups above.

Finally, with respect to the process, establishing clarity about how (and to whom) the results of assessment will be fed back is also important. For example, will a report be presented to the board of directors or senior management? Who within the entity will have responsibility for ensuring follow-up on resulting recommendations? This should be addressed upfront, before the assessment activities are initiated. In some instances it may be desirable to conduct the self-assessment under the leadership of a dedicated working group or task team, who can then review the results and provide recommendations about the feasibility and implications of implementing the Sustainability Framework in that entity context.

## • Key issues/questions to consider

Table 3 provides a sample list of questions that can be used to facilitate the consultation activities conducted as part of the self-assessment process.

**TABLE 3: Sample list of questions to be addressed as part of the self-assessment process**

Minimum essential building block	Key questions to consider
<b>1. Corporate commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a clear corporate statement of commitment related to the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures? Is this an explicit commitment or is it implied or inferred as part of another wider corporate commitment?</li> <li>• Is the scope of what is meant by the organization's commitment to environmental and social sustainability clear? Is it measurable and/or reinforced by targets or goals?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Performance/ quality standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any performance standards or quality criteria related to the delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures?</li> <li>• How are they articulated in relation to the three entry points: policy/strategy, programme/project, and facilities/operations?</li> <li>• Are these performance standards used as part of regular monitoring, reporting and evaluation activities?</li> </ul>
<b>3. Operational procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific procedures in place related to the operationalization of the above performance standards and/ or organizational commitments to environmental and social sustainability measures?</li> <li>• Are they used and understood?</li> <li>• Are staff regularly informed about and trained on their use and application? Is there a dedicated entity in place to ensure that this happens?</li> </ul>

Minimum essential building block	Key questions to consider
<b>4. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability and transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your organization have a policy on access to information?</li> <li>• Is there a mechanism in place to support disclosure of information?</li> <li>• Is stakeholder engagement required during the development of policies, programmes and projects and if so, with whom?</li> <li>• Is there a grievance and complaints mechanism? How are these issues currently handled within your entity?</li> <li>• Are there independent oversight, evaluation and audit functions? If so, do they (or could they) have the capacity to address environmental and social sustainability compliance and accountability issues?</li> </ul>
<b>5. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of monitoring and evaluation structures and systems are currently being used? Which of them could be used to monitor and report on environmental and social sustainability issues?</li> <li>• Would this monitoring and evaluation structures and system be able to capture important details about environmental and social sustainability performance at all three entry points of activity?</li> <li>• Does the entity engage in any organizational wide reporting on corporate sustainability?</li> </ul>

In addition or as an alternative to consultation activities, information can be gathered as part of a document review. The amount of work and time required for this will depend on the depth and breadth of information sought as part of the review. To make it easier to cluster the findings, the document review could be structured along the three entry points defined in the Sustainability Framework. Typical materials that would be considered include the following:

- Core entity documents, e.g. entity mission statements, strategic objectives, policies and strategies;
- Guidance materials, norms and/or standard operating procedures related to planning, implementation and monitoring and reporting on programmes and projects;
- Guidance and/or operating procedures related to facilities management and operations, e.g. waste recycling, energy consumption, etc.

Key things to look for as part of the document review include:

- Whether the scope of environmental and/or social sustainability issues being addressed is clearly defined, and whether related measures and obligations to address them are also clearly defined. For example, if the definition (and overall understanding) about what constitutes social sustainability is not clear, it will leave much room for interpretation; the result being that coverage of social issues will be uneven and difficult to measure and demonstrate.

- Coherence in the ways that environmental and social sustainability issues are addressed across the three entry points should also be considered to the extent possible. For instance if there is a policy in place on green procurement, the document review should examine how/if this is reflected in guidance on procurement in specific programme areas.

#### GRAPH 4: Steps in the self-assessment process

1. Identification of relevant stakeholder groups
2. Dialogue and Consultation Activities with stakeholders' representatives  
Alternative: Document Review
3. Analyse views and inputs from stakeholders
4. Report results of the analysis
5. Collect feedback of the report from stakeholders







**PART 3**

**NEXT STEPS –  
WHERE TO GO  
FROM HERE?**

## PART 3 - Next steps – where to go from here?

Part 3 provides suggestions about how to make sense of the results of the self-assessment process, including how to frame it as part of a longer-term strategy or plan to enhance corporate sustainability performance.

### MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

One of the main objectives underpinning the development of this guide was to sensitize entities about the potential implications of adopting and implementing environmental and social sustainability measures as proposed in the Sustainability Framework. Staff would develop a better understanding about how and where sustainability measures could be used in their work. Further, they would also begin to realize the implications of what it might take to operationalize them.

The resource implications of implementing the Sustainability Framework will begin to become apparent following the conclusion of the self-assessment process. However, a phased approach to implementation and learning by doing process may help entities better understand the needed resources and capacities. Key issues that will likely require further reflection include:

- Need for dedicated resources (financial and human) to support the development and delivery of environmental and social sustainability measures, including capacity development and technical support functions needed;
- Cost implications and potential sources of finance to ensure the delivery of the above;
- Feasibility of using existing resources and structures to support the use of environmental and social sustainability measures.

The last point is especially important as it has the potential to influence the speed and nature of the approach taken, for example, if done incrementally starting with a specific area of work or entry point, or with a specific initial sub-set of issues.

## Two examples of taking a phased approach

*The following are examples of the ways that UN entities have approached the introduction of environmental and social sustainability measures at the programme and project level. Both have taken a phased approach, albeit in different ways as highlighted below:*

### UNDP

UNDP first started with an environmental screening procedure for projects. This was endorsed by UNDP senior management for a phased roll-out which included a “ground-truthing” phase where the screening procedure was applied by a set of Country Offices (COs) to a sample of projects. Based on this ground-truthing phase, one of the key changes made was to expand the screening procedure to explicitly include both social and environmental issues. Following the ground-truthing phase the screening procedure was accordingly revised, approved, and integrated into UNDP’s Programming and Operations Policies and Procedures in 2012. Since then, UNDP has moved towards strengthening social and environmental policy commitments and standards through a set of Social and Environmental Standards and related Compliance Review and Dispute Resolution Process. In 2014, UNDP is conducting an internal and external review of the standards which will then be revised and presented to senior management for endorsement. UNDP is also conducting a review of lessons learned from implementation of their Environmental and Social Screening Procedure. In conjunction with the new standards and revised screening procedure, UNDP is elaborating a roll-out plan which will look at the various institutional and capacity components needed to ensure implementation is embedded in UNDP’s way of doing business.<sup>31</sup>

### WHO

WHO developed an environmental management procedure which involves screening of proposals, provision of support for the development and implementation of environmental management measures, and monitoring and reporting. While the procedure addresses environmental management actions to be taken at all phases in the life-cycle of a project, the approach has been to pilot its use on a representative sample of WHO projects. In other words, WHO is taking an incremental approach that starts with a pilot phase. The rationale was to establish and test the use of a comprehensive approach that could be eventually scaled-up to include the whole work of the organization.

During this initial phase of testing and development, the WHO environmental management procedure was focused on addressing five initial issues: 1) procurement of medicines and medicines supplies; 2) health care waste management; 3) water and sanitation in health care facilities; 4) small-scale construction of health care facilities; and 5) health care worker occupational health and safety. In taking this approach, it was assumed that it would be easier to influence the necessary change in attitudes and behaviour of technical staff if there were only a few issues to address. This assumption was correct. Overall acceptance related to the use of the environmental management procedure has been established. The feasibility of integrating other environmental and social sustainability issues is now being explored.

31. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/social-and-environmental-sustainability-in-undp/feedback/>

# MAPPING A PROCESS FOR INSTITUTIONALIZING THE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

The process of effecting change on sustainability issues at the individual entity level can be challenging and slow. Recognizing this, entities should plan an appropriately phased and deliberative process, taking lessons learned from other entities within the system and “learning by doing” as they go.

Guided by the results of the self-assessment, UN entities will be able to determine their respective sustainability priorities and proceed to developing an action plan. (Note: an action plan approach is recommended here, but other approaches may be more suitable for entities depending on their mandate, activities and desired sustainability measures.)

Developing an action plan will:

- allow the entity’s leadership team to build and retain entity support for the initiative;
- align its activities with its goals and priorities;
- permit it to phase activities over a reasonable timeframe;
- consolidate an appropriate approach for enhancing entity sustainability; and
- ensure better management, monitoring and evaluation of the initiative.

Most UN entities, in fact, have experience with developing and implementing action plans of this nature. Therefore, this should not represent an insurmountable challenge. While each entity will have to develop its own action plan, experience suggests a number of basic elements should be included (see box below).

## Basic elements of an action plan

- **Direction.** Description of the overall direction the entity wants to take.
- **Stakeholders.** Identification and characterization of the entity's stakeholders for sustainability changes, both internal and external, their interests and views.
- **Approach.** Description of the basic approach to advancing entity sustainability for the appropriate entry points of the Sustainability Framework.
- **Priorities.** Identification of specific priority areas for action.
- **Technical framework.** Definition of policies, procedures and accountability necessary to support the priority actions (see more detail on these above).
- **Implementation support.** Assembling the building blocks for effective implementation, e.g. high-level political commitment, institutional anchoring, human and financial resources, capacity building, communications and awareness raising, tracking systems, monitoring, evaluation and reporting (see more detail on these above).
- **Timeline.** Definition of a timeline for taking action, especially if taking a phased and iterative approach.
- **Staffing and resources.** Identification of responsible staff and allocation of appropriate resources.
- **Next steps.** Identification of immediate next steps in getting the action plan started.
- **Review and evaluation.** Description of the process for reviewing progress and assuring expected outcomes.

Framing the development and execution of an action plan on implementing environmental and social sustainability measures within a wider sustainability management approach may also be helpful. For example, as part of the work being supported by the EMG and the Sustainable UN (SUN) initiative, a five-step environmental management system framework was developed for use in facilitating the integration of sustainability measures into facilities and operations. This was modeled on an example used in ISO 14001. While this Environmental Management System Milestones Framework and its related approach was developed for use at the facility and operations entry point, it provides a useful example that could be applied at all three entry points.<sup>32</sup>

32. *Environmental Management System Milestones Framework*. Unite Platform, February (2014)

## LOOKING AHEAD

As is evidently clear, the path and process to corporate sustainability that will be followed by each entity will be entity specific. For entities that implement activities which have clear associated environmental and social sustainability issues, the incentive to progress on this path may be faster. For others, this progression may be more gradual. Irrespective of the speed at which the different entities move ahead, in all cases, ensuring corporate sustainability should be conceptualized as a journey that will most certainly be achieved through a process of progressive realization.







# ANNEXES

# ANNEX A – GLOSSARY, ACRONYMS AND CONTRIBUTORS

## GLOSSARY

**Environmental impact assessment:** a process of systematic analysis of the potential environmental effects (physical, biological, etc.) of projects or programmes and identification of appropriate preventive actions and/or mitigation measures to avoid, prevent, minimize or mitigate significant adverse environmental effects identified.

**Environmental and Social Safeguards:** means “to prevent and mitigate undue harm to people and their environment in the development process. These policies provide guidelines for bank and borrower staffs in the identification, preparation, and implementation of programs and projects. Safeguard policies have often provided a platform for the participation of stakeholders in project design, and have been an important instrument for building ownership among local populations”.<sup>33</sup>

**Social impact assessment:** a process of systematic analysis of the effects of development proposals on people and the human environment. This analysis aims to identify the social consequences of a proposed action, giving particular attention to mitigating adverse or unintended effects.

**Strategic environmental assessment:** a process of systematic analysis of the environmental effects of development policies, plans, programmes and other proposed strategic actions. The process extends the aims and principles of EIA upstream in the decision-making process and beyond the project level, when major alternatives are still open.

**UN entity:** the term is used to cover all UN agencies, funds and programmes.

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## ACRONYMS

CO	Country Office
DP	Delivery Partner
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EMG	Environment Management Group
EMS	Environmental Management System
ESM	Environmental Sustainability Management
ESS	Environmental and Social Sustainability
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
HLCM	High Level Committee on Management
HQ	Headquarter
IAMLADP	International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMG	Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITC ILO	International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OHSAS	Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series
SES	Social and Environmental Standards
SUN	Sustainable UN
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNON	United Nations Office at Nairobi
WHO	World Health Organization

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**The Environment Management Group (EMG)** is a United Nations System-wide coordination body. It furthers inter-agency **Cooperation** in support of the implementation of the international environmental and human settlement agenda. Its **Membership** consists of the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations including the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. It is chaired by the Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and supported by a secretariat provided by UNEP. More information on the EMG can be found at [www.unemg.org](http://www.unemg.org).