



# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement      Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente  
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде      برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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## 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Consultative Process for Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System

13.05.2014

Teleconference from 03:00 p.m. to 05:00 p.m. (Geneva time).

EMG/

Distribution: Consultative process

## Draft Summary of the discussion and agreed actions

### I: Introduction

The fifth meeting of the EMG Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability was held by teleconference on 13 May 2014 to review the progress made since its retreat in June 2013 and to discuss follow-up activities and recommendations on the next steps of the Process for consideration of the 20<sup>th</sup> EMG senior officials meeting in September 2014. The provincial agenda of the meeting and the list of participants are attached to this report as Annex I and II.

### II: Key considerations and agreed actions

#### 1) Update of progress made since the last meeting of the Consultative Process

The co-chairs opened the meeting at 3pm (Geneva time). They briefed the Consultative Process on the progress made since the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EMG senior officials and provided an overview of issues requiring follow-up. These included:

- a) Follow up of the Options Paper on the system wide aspects of the Framework for Enhancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system and the reactions received from CEB members <sup>1</sup>
- b) The meeting of the Drafting Group of the Consultative Process <sup>2</sup> in January 2014 on the interim Sustainability Guide for the UN system and options for piloting of the Framework by interested agencies and improving communications around the Framework.
- c) The meeting of World Bank, OLA, UNDP and the EMG Secretariat on the legal issues and implications of the Framework in April 2013
- a) Considerations of the 27<sup>th</sup> session of the UN High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) on the Framework . <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> • The consultative process received reactions to the Options Paper from 17 UN agencies on system wide follow up of the Framework. The comments received made various suggestions on the way forward, without offering a clear conclusion on the future direction of the Framework. Most of the comments emphasized the need to continue the ESS Process to further elaborate the Framework, provide a good understanding of its relevance to the wider sustainable development processes, and its usefulness and implications for the work of the UN agencies.

<sup>2</sup> The open-ended drafting group composed of WHO, UNEP, UNDP, WB, WFP and FAO has supported the Consultative Process and the EMG Secretariat through this process.

<sup>3</sup> The HLCP discussed the Options Paper at its 27<sup>th</sup> Session in Chile in March 2014, expressing concern about the lack of clarity of the Paper and what it sought to achieve. The HLCP saw the need to better understand the implications of the

## **Other general issues in the opening remarks of the co-chairs included :**

- The need to reflect on the ongoing process within the UNDG with regards to sustainability management and identify how the Framework can fit into the 2015 agenda.
- The Framework is ambitious and aims at covering the UN System in full. The Consultative Process could reflect on whether the focus should remain on the Framework as a whole as it is further elaborated, or if it should rather be repositioned to focus on specific areas of work where the different UN agencies could learn from each other's experience (e.g. assessments and screening tools for projects).
- UNDP emphasised that agencies view the legal issues as an administrative matter and due to differing agency-specific approaches, legal issues may not be best handled in a system-wide approach.
- It would be useful to examine how the Framework is implemented in different agencies and what implications this would have, and share and learn from each other's experience.
- Efforts should be made to improve the messaging and better explain the Framework and what it entails. Methods could be simplified in order to avoid confusion regarding how the Framework relates to the global level on the one hand and the individual agency level on the other hand.

### **Agreed Action**

Following the co-chairs opening remarks and a general discussion, the Consultative Process agreed to follow the progression on sustainability management within the UNDG more closely to make sure the two processes are aligned. The comments and concerns provided by the HLCP will be looked at in the context of the Framework itself and the Interim Guidance and for the time being, the Options Paper will not be revised.

## **2) Issues concerning the Consultative Process requiring follow-up or decision**

### **The Consultative Process considered for further follow up action or decision as follows:**

#### a) Potential further elaboration of the Sustainability Framework

##### *1. Should the consultative process consider revisiting the Sustainability Framework?*

The Consultative Process discussed the possible need to further elaborate the Framework e.g. to address implications of implementing the Framework, including financial and legal implications and required organizational changes for individual organizations.

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Framework before it is further applied The Framework was, however, seen as a potentially relevant input to the Post 2015 Development Goals, guiding sustainability within the UN system.

### **Key Considerations:**

- The World Bank informed discussions within the Bank on expanding the scope of its current safeguards policy and potential consequences for accountability, responsibilities, and staffing.
- UNEP suggested that the discussion on legal implications could be linked to the discussion on standards and principles, when it is understood what an agency commits to when applying the Framework. Being aware of legal implications and costs is crucial for an agency to be able to decide if the Framework can be applied.
- UNDP supported by WHO advised to delay the inclusion of any legal aspects in the Framework until feedback has been received by the agencies implementing it on a pilot basis. Implications will be agency-specific. What is relevant for one agency may not be relevant for another.
- WFP shared its experience developing a health and safety policy, and indicated that a comprehensive understanding of all implications of a new policy in the beginning of the process may be unrealistic to expect.

### **Agreed action:**

The Consultative Process concluded that the Framework does not need to include new aspects at this stage. It is instead important to keep the discussion going and learn from experiences as the implementation of the Framework proceeds.

#### *2. Should the Sustainability Framework be expanded to include “Economic Sustainability”?*

The Consultative Process discussed whether the Framework should be developed to include the currently missing economic sustainability component, and if so, in what way.

### **Key Considerations:**

- UNEP informed its preparation of an environmental social and economic sustainability framework, aimed at setting minimum sustainability standards for the operations of UNEP and its partners to improve the overall quality of its outcomes. The UNEP framework addresses economic sustainability from a poverty and inequality, do-no-harm perspective, that distinguishes economic sustainability from economic safeguards. It is proposed to follow a phased approach to gradually integrate economic sustainability considerations into the Framework.
- UNDP explained that the eight sustainability standards that apply to UNDP projects and programs focus on the social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Socioeconomic issues are considered implicitly, as part of protecting people and the environment. Defining and putting explicit economic safeguards in place was, however, considered a very demanding, complex and challenging task as there is no model to draw from and the capacities needed to operationalize such are missing. Also, ensuring that governments and partners comply with economic safeguards would be extremely difficult.
- The World Bank shared UNDP’s views, remarking that the Bank’s sustainability safeguards do not include clearly defined economic standards. The World Bank further emphasised that

cost-benefit analyses are part of normal assessment processes, and should not be forgotten even if it is decided to exclude economic sustainability considerations from the Framework .

- WHO, supported by WFP, agreed that much of the work on social safeguards includes an economic aspect although it is not explicitly defined. However, this issue should not stop the process from going forward, building on what is already there.
- UNOPS said they had struggled with the same issues related. From their “opportunities” perspective (to enhance sustainability), they concluded that the economic aspect need not be excluded entirely if looked at from a broad angle.
- UNDESA underlined that the Framework will be applied in the context of intergovernmental policy making. The Consultative Process could begin tackling the issue by trying to capture, express and clearly define what is meant by economic sustainability. When concluded, this work could be included in the final version of the guidance document.

### **Agreed Action**

The Consultative Process concluded that the Framework provides a good basis as it currently stands, and was not to integrate economic sustainability into the Framework at this stage. However, reflections on economic sustainability should continue e.g., economic sustainability could be considered from a financial perspective, beginning with the programmatic level. The Consultative Process invited UNEP to share what it has prepared on economic sustainability in its new sustainability framework - drawing on that, it could pursue further discussions on how economic sustainability could best be handled in the Sustainability Framework.

3. *Should the consultative process propose a common set of sustainability principles or standards against which individual or collective E&S sustainability actions can be measured?*

The Consultative Process discussed whether common sustainability principles are needed in the context of the Framework.

### **Key Considerations:**

- WHO, supported by WFP, emphasised the importance of reaching a common understanding of what is meant by environmental and social sustainability and what the boundaries are. The lack of a common definition for the UN system and the difficulty to agree on such, makes the implementation and measurement of the Framework challenging. This challenge was linked to the definition of common standards or principles.
- UNDP reminded the group of the ongoing Post 2015 process and that many agencies already have their own set of principles in place. Agreeing on a common set of system-wide standards would be very challenging. It would be more important to reach a common understanding of what we mean by the Framework, formulate messages on what it provides and does not provide, how it links to the SDGs and pay attention to how we communicate around it.

UNDP further informed that UNDG has conducted a study to review the normative and operational agencies' work under the UNDAF programming network, leading to a proposed revision of the Delivering as One initiative. It would be crucial to draw on the outcome of these processes in any consideration of standards and principles.

### **Agreed Action**

UNDP offered to keep the Consultative Process informed of the processes and outcomes of the work undertaken in the UNDG to share its sustainability principles and standards and to share the outcomes of the work prepared by the UNDAF Planning Network with the group to initiate further discussions on principles and standards by the Consultative Process and to seek the views of EMG members.

### **b) Interim Guidance for UN Entities**

A revised draft of the Interim guide prepared by the Drafting Group was distributed to the Consultative Process as part of the meeting documents. The Consultative Process discussed the next steps in the process of publishing the Interim Guidance and envisaged a project involving the testing the Framework using the guide in a 5-6 pilot agencies.

#### **Key Considerations:**

- The Consultative Process concluded that the Interim guidance is ready to be piloted. The pilot agencies should represent different types of organisations and diversity of mandate and operation.
- The pilot could focus on agencies that are getting started with their process, but other agencies that are further along could bring much added value to others through lessons learned and a basic understanding of what it takes to develop a sustainability framework.
- The pilot would explore how well the Framework and Guide succeed in communicating their message to different actors involved in the execution, and help understand and gather and share intelligence on specific issues, such as operational requirements.
- A mechanism for capturing the learning from others needs to be developed.
- A consultant could be hired to help document the experience.
- UNDESA suggested bringing on board and consulting the UN Evaluation Group a well-established network, and working with the second report on mainstreaming sustainable development in the UN system, on how to approach the pilot phase.
- UN Women could be consulted on their experience piloting the System Wide Action Plan on Gender (SWAP).
- Potential pilot agencies could be UNEP, WHO, UNOPS, WFP, FAO, IFAD, UN Women and OHCHR ( to be confirmed).

### **Agreed Action**

The Consultative Process concluded that the Interim Guidance is beneficial for agencies developing sustainability frameworks, and should be published. The interim guide will be reviewed and modified based on the piloting of the Framework. EMG members will be given the opportunity to provide any last comments on the draft by the end of May, which will be integrated before it is finalized and proceeds to publication. A foreword explaining that the guide is a work in progress should be added to the guide.

The Consultative Process further agreed to identify agencies that would be part of the pilot project testing the guide. Procedures for a feedback mechanism need to be agreed. A concept note outlining the project will be developed by WHO.

**3) Suggested recommendations for the future of the Consultative Process for consideration of EMG SOM20**

**Agreed Action**

The Co-chairs will prepare draft recommendations on the future activities of the Consultative process for the consideration of the EMG SOM, based on the meeting conclusions. The draft recommendations will be sent to the Consultative Process for comments and may be initially presented to the EMG Technical Segment at its meeting in June 2014.

**4) Other matters**

The meeting thanked Michaela Pfeiffer and Holly Mergler from WHO and UNDP respectively for their exemplary roles as co-chairs of the Drafting Group.

**5) Closure of the meeting**

The co-chairs closed the meeting at 5pm GVA time.

## **Annex I**



### **UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME**

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**EMG/**  
01.05.2014  
Distribution: Consultative  
process

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## **Provisional Agenda**

- 1) Opening Remarks by Co-chairs of the Consultative Process**
- 2) Adoption of the Agenda**
- 3) Update of progress made since the last meeting of the Consultative Process**
- 4) Issues concerning the Consultative Process requiring follow-up or decision**
  - a) Potential further elaboration of the Sustainability Framework
    - *Should the consultative process consider revisiting the Sustainability Framework?*
    - *Should the Sustainability Framework be expanded to include “Economic Sustainability”?*
    - *Should the consultative process propose a common set of sustainability principles or standards against which individual or collective E&S sustainability actions can be measured?*
  - b) Interim Guidance for UN Entities
    - *Finalization, approval and dissemination of the interim guidance*
    - *Application of the interim guidance in pilot agencies to learn from experience and better understand the implications of implementing the Framework (including costs, legal implications and required organization changes for individual organizations)*
- 5) Preparation of a report on actions taken and proposed further actions for submission to the EMG Senior Officials in September 2014**
- 6) Other matters**
- 7) Closure of the meeting**

## Annex II

### **Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system Audio-video conference 13 May 2014**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Functional Title</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
1	Ms. Federica Pietracci	Senior Economic Affairs Officer	UN DESA Via video
2	Mr. George Bouma	Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) Environment and Energy Group (EEG)	UNDP Via video
3	Ms. Holly Mergler	Programme Specialist, Environmental Mainstreaming	UNDP Via video
4	Ms. Maria Teresa Pisani	Economic Affairs Officer	UNECE Via audio
5	Ms. Yunae Yi	Programme Officer, Quality Assurance Section	UNEP Via audio
6	Ms. Brennan Van Dyke	Deputy Director, Office for Operations Director, Donor Partnerships, GEF Coordination and Contributions	UNEP
7	Mr. Elliott Harris	Director NY UNEP Office and EMG	UNEP
8	Mr. Hossein Fadaei	Senior Liaison Officer	UNEP EMG
9	Ms. Jannica Pitkanen- Brunnsberg	Junior Professional Officer	UNEP EMG
10	Ms. Cecilia Lopez y Royo	Environment and Sustainability Advisor Global Partner Services Office / Africa Office, Nairobi, Kenya	UNOPS Via audio
11	Mr. Ary Bobrow	Sustainability Programme Manager	UNOPS
12	Ms. Brenda Behan	Chief, Infrastructure and Facilities Management Management Services Division	WFP Via video
13	Ms. Georgina Stickels	Environmental Sustainability Manager	WFP Via video
14	Ms. Michaela Pfeiffer	Technical Officer	WHO
15	Mr. Charles Di Leva	Chief Counsel Environmental and International Law	World Bank via audio