

# The UN Environment Management Group Peer Review Process

A Voluntary Review of Environmental Performance



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**EMG**

## What is the Peer Review Process?

The Peer Review Project was initiated in 2012 by the United Nation's Environment Management Group (EMG). The Project aims to review the environmental sustainability profile and performance of voluntary international organizations who are Members of the Group. Peer reviewing refers to one or more of the Group's Members reviewing the environmental performance of fellow Members' facilities and internal operations.

The Peer Review is undertaken by Peer Review Teams comprising technical experts, UN and international organization representatives, and local government authorities, with support and coordination provided by the EMG Secretariat. The Peer Review Team analyses data and information provided by the reviewed agency based on site visits to the reviewed facility(ies). Achievements, challenges, good practices and lessons learned in approaches to corporate environmental management are then identified and

compiled into a Peer Review Report, along with proposed recommendations on how the environmental performance of the reviewed entity could be further improved. These are useful not only for the reviewed entity but to the wider UN system as well. The Peer Review Process relies solely on data and information which are made available by the reviewed UN entities and does not involve any measurements or any complex analysis, including modelling or simulation exercises.

For every Peer Review, the results are guided and validated by a Peer Review Body which comprises representatives from international organisations. The entire Process is governed by a set of principles which include mutual trust among peers, voluntary participation and non-binding recommendations – these principles are what set the Peer Review Process aside from traditional environmental and energy audits.

## What are the Main Features of the Peer Review Process?

### 1 Four main actors involved in the Peer Review Process

- a.) **The Peer Review Body** – comprises representatives of the different entities and operates with a peer spirit of open dialogue, result-orientated analysis and exchange of experience, advisory conclusions and recommendations. The Peer Review Body convenes to discuss and approve the draft Peer Review Reports, including the finalisation of recommendations. The Body then reports to the EMG annual Senior Officials Meeting and is supported by the EMG Secretariat.
- b.) **The Reviewed Entity** – partakes in providing access to data and documentation, answering questions, hosting visits and facilitating contacts with a range of relevant individuals and organizations involved in the Peer Review. It has an interest in moving reforms forward through the review process and its recommendations.
- c.) **The Reviewer Entities (Peer Review Team)** – the reviewer entities are selected on a rotating basis from among the different members of the Peer Review Body. They act as peers (not inspectors) in the early stage of the process – e.g. as individual and objective representatives or experts involved in the analytic work and the field missions, and lead in the peer review debate.
- d.) **The EMG Secretariat** – provides a neutral ground in the individual review processes and provides continuity and consistency of the sequence of reviews. At any point in time, the Secretariat may hire the expertise of a technical consultant to ensure accuracy and analytic quality with regards to the Peer Review Process. The balance of the Secretariat's involvement with the specific Reviewer Entities may vary according to review programs – however, its role always remains substantially more labour-intensive, rather than technical.

### 2 Trust as a component of the Peer Review spirit

The Peer Review Process relies on mutual trust among entities and shared confidence throughout the process. Individuals conducting reviews act as fellow peers gathering facts, assessing progress and providing recommendations, not as inspectors or teachers. Reviews build on exchange of best practices, use of internationally established standards and principles, non-adversarial Peer Reviews, non-binding conclusions and recommendations.

### 3 Four Peer Review steps:

For all Peer Reviews, several stages are required in sequence: Preparatory, Consultation, Peer Review, and Release/Ownership:

01

**Preparation stage**  
(EMG driven)

02

**Consultation stage**  
(EMG driven)

03

**Peer review stage**  
(PRB driven)

04

**Ownership stage**  
(driven by the Reviewed entity)



a.) **The Preparatory Stage** – relies on general clarification of the Peer Review Process to be undertaken, agreed between the EMG Secretariat and the Reviewed Entity. In addition to this, the Peer Review Team is formed, work is undertaken around available information and data, and objectives (scope and focus of the Peer Review, aims, goals, targets; formal and declarative) are developed; a survey from the EMG Secretariat to the Reviewed Entity is also due for completion. Where necessary, if the peer review site requires an initial scoping visit, then this is undertaken – this is usually the case for field offices.



b.) **The Consultation Stage** – involves a recommended on-site visit undertaken by the Peer Review Team, alongside the consultation of relevant officials and staff of the reviewed entity. As part of the review, the Reviewed Agency is requested to submit available data to the Peer Review Team, who then prepare a Draft Peer Review Report including draft conclusions and recommendations, with the transmission of this draft document to all members of the collective Peer Review Body – well in advance of the proposed Peer Review Body Meeting.



c.) **The Peer Review Stage** – undertaken by the Peer Review Body, which for every review includes an exchange among peers and the review and revision of the draft conclusions and recommendations. The Peer Review Body Meeting will discuss and adopt the final non-binding conclusions and recommendations on both the achievements and the areas for progress, to be transmitted to the Senior Officials Meeting of the EMG and likewise to top officials of the Reviewed Entity.



d.) **The Release/Ownership Stage** – driven by the Reviewed Entity with support of the EMG Secretariat. Chiefly, this stage includes a presentation to and by top officials, staff involvement, media releases on appropriate websites and relationships with local, national and international press – alongside any chosen follow-up of the recommendations. The overall process of assessment by peers is based on evidence, a neutral stance, and non-obligatory recommendations. These three components are key for the peer reviews' credibility and influence; and with them the process differs from other programmes which may require self-reporting by organisations or countries to independent and impartial bodies. Moreover, the Process does not carry sanctions.

#### 4 Content of the Peer Review:

The substance of the Process is brought together in the Peer Review Report and can vary substantially; for example, the contents may consider parameters including: energy, water, waste, staff behaviour and awareness and environmental policy review etc. Additionally, a review of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) related to air travel may be considered. These parameters are assembled within the structure of some common features throughout the report, which include: the achievements, challenges and recommendations associated with the findings of the Peer Review Process and the position of the Reviewed Entity with regards to particular review topics.

## Who has been Peer Reviewed so far?

Since 2013, the Peer Review Process has involved a range of UN entities and facilities, including headquarters and offices located in field operations. Some examples of these entities and their review criteria, plus feedback from those involved in the review, are included here.

World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) headquarters has been reviewed against GHG emissions management, waste management, ICT and green events/meetings, and GHG emissions and management related to air travel.

*“Benefits of a 3rd party peer review, we are in this instance looking to take advantage of specific expertise in respect to renewable energy development that may be available from other UN agencies. The recommendations received in this occasion were very relevant and useful. We were pleased to be peer reviewed and therefore we encourage other UN agencies to do so as well.”*

Mr. Carlo Tancredi (WMO), Facility Management Engineer.

UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) headquarters has been reviewed against: waste and water management, greenhouse gas emissions, the management of emissions in buildings and facilities, and staff awareness, involvement and training (including local transport).

*“The peer review offered Building Management Services (BMS) an opportunity to receive professional feedback, which has brought new insights in facilities management and has given BMS the chance to validate its efforts. It also enhanced the relation between UN entities as we have shared knowledge and experiences.”*

Mr. Diego Masera (UNIDO), Building Management Services Division Chief.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been reviewed against GHG emissions management in buildings and facilities, waste management, and communication and outreach. GHG emissions from air travel were also reviewed.

*“The Peer Review process was a chance to share IMF accomplishments with colleagues from other UN entities, while also providing a different perspective of the challenges we face. The recommendations were invaluable to the growth of our program.”*

Ms. Evelyn Nash (IMF), Environment, Health, Safety and Sustainability Officer.

UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) field offices in Amman, Jordan were reviewed against GHG emissions management in buildings and facilities, waste and water management and transportation-related GHG emissions.

## What are the benefits of being Peer Reviewed?

### A basis for further improvement in environmental performance:

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

### A voluntary and non-obligatory Process:

- The Peer Review Process is a tool which provides voluntary participants with non-obligatory recommendations and the sharing of best practices in corporate environmental management. The Process differs from other methods which may require self-reporting obligations by entities to independent and impartial third parties.

### A unique mutual learning experience:

- The Process of sharing experience on best practices is an important capacity building instrument, for: i) the entity under review, ii) the entities participating in the process as specific Reviewer Entities, and iii) the entities participating simply in the responsible collective Peer Review Body. Collectively, entities involved in the Peer Review Process benefit of sharing best practices and mutual learning, with some economies of scale and faster transfer of know-how; in turn there is more efficient progress towards respective goals, by the entities involved. The peer nature of this Process allows a method for other involved agencies to gather best practices and examples for their own implementation.

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

- The Peer Review Process is in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Secretary General's determination to have the UN lead by example and maintain sustainability as a top priority – a step forward towards “walking the talk”.

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## How can my organisation get involved?

To get involved and to find out more about either having your organisation peer reviewed or participating as a peer reviewer of another UN entity, please get in touch with the UN Environment Management Group at [emg@unep.org](mailto:emg@unep.org)



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