

Concept Note on UN System-wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS)

Summary:

This concept note is a food for thought paper by the EMG Secretariat to help the discussion of the 21st meeting of the Senior Officials of the EMG on the issue of a UN System Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS), providing a context and possible contributions of the SWFS to enhancing system wide collaboration and coherence in response to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 sustainable development agenda as well as an indicative plan for preparation of the SWFS.

Context

Over the past four decades, environmental activities have become an increasingly integral component of the work of the UN system as a whole, reflecting both the intrinsic links of environmental matters to a broad range of issues, as well as the growing importance attributed to the environment by Member States through the governing bodies of the UN system. The associated mandates range from setting international environmental norms and standards, providing policy support and capacity building to Member States, to integrating environmental sustainability into the operations and activities of the UN agencies.

The increased focus on environmental issues in the UN system is a significant achievement reflecting the growing competence and capacity of the system in environmental matters. Strategic approaches on the environment have been developed in many agencies as part of their overall strategic and programmatic frameworks. However, as a consequence of this, effective implementation now also requires greater coherence of policy frameworks and better coordination.

Accordingly, in addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development and environmental governance in the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, Member States emphasized the importance of enhanced coordination within the UN system for coherence and effectiveness of its efforts through system-wide strategies on the environment.¹ Following that, the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to “develop system-wide strategies on the environment mainly through the EMG and to invite the engagement of the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to facilitate broad ownership in the United Nations at all levels”².

Concurrently the coming adoption of the 2030 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has raised the level of ambition for the whole UN system to support most effectively and coherently the efforts of governments over the next 15 years to achieve sustainable development. The senior officials of the Environment Management Group (EMG) at their 20th meeting in September 2014 considered the above calls by Member States as an

¹ Paragraphs 87-88 of the outcome document

² Resolution 1/11

opportunity to explore possibilities to achieve greater coherence on the environment benefitting from the SDGs as a common guideline for creating convergence among existing or future agencies strategies on the environment.

Potential contributions of A System Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS)

1. Setting out a shared vision on the environment for the UN system and facilitating agencies alignments with the SDGs (internal alignment)

The vision of the SWFS is in line with the vision set out by Member States for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which provide the framework for achieving sustainable development. The environmental aspects of the SDGs can therefore serve as the short- to medium-term objectives of the SWFS and define the expected outcomes of the environmental activities of the UN system. The environmental priorities identified in the 2030 sustainable development agenda require integrated, cross-sectoral solutions and aggregated action for successful implementation . They thus provide the necessary orientation for the environmental work programs and strategies of the UN system.

Many UN agencies are already in the process of making their overall strategies and programs/activities consistent with the SDG agenda, including the area of the environment. This process of internal alignment is expected to lead over time to a convergence of the environmental work of the UN system around the environmental components of the SDGs. Individual agencies may continue to pursue environmental activities that are not explicitly captured in the SDGs, but their strategic alignment with the SDGs will gradually ensure that these activities will all contribute to, or be relevant to, the achievement of the environmental components of the SDGs. The environmental work of some EMG member agencies specifically the MEAs is determined by the agreements and commitments of the member states under the respective conventions . However , the consistency of the sustainable development agenda with the multilateral environmental agreements (MEA) and other previously agreed commitments of member states in the environmental domain, ensures that the SWFS also covers the objectives of the principal Multilateral Environmental Agreements, facilitating their achievement alongside, and as part of, the SDGs. The SWFS will facilitate collection of information and identify good practices of the UN agencies in better and effective alignment with the SDGs.

2. Facilitating consideration of areas of collaboration among the UN agencies in responding to the SDGs (external alignment) and better coordination in planning and implementation

To the extent that the SWFS facilitates a deeper awareness among all agencies of what each individual EMG member is doing to align its strategy and work program with the sustainable development agenda , it helps to identify potential areas for new or deeper collaboration among agencies . It can therefore contribute to the development of more collaborative , and ultimately more coordinated approaches , by the UN system on environmental sustainability issues that warrant cooperation and coordinated action to engage in collective and coherent responses to those issues. This function of the SWFS would contribute greatly to the work of the UN system wide inter-agency mechanisms such as EMG, UN Water, UN Energy and the UN Oceans in helping to identify issues for their consideration in a systematic and mutually informed manner.

By facilitating access to information (through a common platform) on successful policies and practices in the UN system on the environment, the SWFS can help in a more coordinated, informed and effective planning and execution of environmental activities.

3. Providing a mechanism for measuring the internal alignment and external alignment with the SDGs

The SWFS would be monitored measuring to what extent the Framework is contributing to the internal and external alignment of UN agencies in their environmentally relevant activities and strategies, reflecting how UN entities, within their mandates and roles, have designed their strategies, projects/programs and management systems to support the environmental dimensions of SDGs. The analysis of this information would be a useful input into subsequent iterations of UN agencies’ strategic planning and project/program development and management. On this basis, measuring the effectiveness of the SWFS will promote the development of new processes and approaches for achieving greater coherence and effectiveness system-wide, if and as appropriate.

The SWFS in its monitoring would measure the progress against established based lines by respective agencies. The starting point for internal alignment would be the degree of the existing alignment that each agency sees between its strategies/program and the sustainable development agenda . The starting point for measuring progress in external alignment could be the extent to which the agencies identify actions to be undertaken jointly with other agencies . The SWFS will not set specific targets to be achieved but measures the progress made over time. The SWFS will not also aim to monitor or review implementation of the SDGs which will be done through other mechanisms.

4. Facilitating coherent reporting on aligning with the SDGs and opportunities for collaboration

Providing information into the SWFS will be synchronized as far as possible with other reporting processes, and should not create an additional burden on agencies. The reports and supporting data are to be shared commodities, on which UN system entities may collectively or individually draw for further analyses and reporting, including for the SG’s Report on mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development and possible UN system reports to the HLPF.

Work-plan of the SWFS

The attached work-plan provides an updated plan for preparation of the SWFS . On the basis of the directions by the Senior Officials , the EMG Consultative Processes will first prepare a first draft of the SWFS which will be presented to the a technical meeting of the Senior Officials in December 2015 for subsequent approval of their heads of agencies.

Indicative Work Plan for preparation of the System Wide Framework of Strategies (SWFS)

Time	Actions	Expected outcome	Responsibilities
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<p>October 2015</p>	<p><i>Fourth meeting of the Consultative Process</i> to follow up on the outcome of SOM21 on SWFS and to prepare an annotated outline on the basis which roles of the preparatory process will be assigned .</p> <p><i>Draft progress report on the preparation of the SWFS presented by the ED of UNEP to the Secretary of the UNEA</i> for advanced consideration of the Open Ended CPR</p>	<p>Agreed elements of the SWFS – division of roles among the participating agencies</p> <p>Progress report submitted to SGB for advanced consideration of CPR</p>	<p>UNEP supported by the Consultative Process and the EMG Sec</p> <p>EMG Sec and UNEP</p>
<p>October- November 2015</p> <p>November</p>	<p><i>Compilation of the draft SWFS drawing on the inputs from the Consultative Process</i></p> <p><i>Exchange of views and incorporation of comments by the EMG members</i> on the draft of the SWFS</p> <p><i>Fifth meeting of the Consultative Process</i> to review the progress of the work</p>	<p>Comments of the EMG members incorporated</p>	<p>Consultative Process and EMG Sec</p> <p>EMG Secretariat</p> <p>EMG Secretariat</p> <p>UNEP Team</p> <p>UNEP Team / EMG Secretariat HLCP Secretariat</p>
<p>December 2015</p>	<p><i>Sixth meeting of the Consultative Process</i> to continue drafting of the SWFS</p>	<p>Draft SWFS</p>	<p>EMG Secretariat</p> <p>Consultative Process</p>

December 2015	<p>Meeting of the technical Segment of the EMG Senior Officials to consider the proposed draft SWFS for approval.</p> <p>Communication by Chair of the EMG on the approval of the final draft of the SWFS to the Senior Officials</p>		
January - February 2016	<p>Submission of a final draft of the SWFS by the ED of UNEP to the Secretary of the UNEA for consideration of the Open Ended CPR and the HLCP</p>	<p>Draft SWFS distributed to OECPR and HLCP for consideration</p>	
April 2016	<p>Submission of the final proposal for the SWFS to the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination</p> <p>Submission of the final proposal for the SWFS to the Secretary of the UNEA</p>	<p>Final SWFS distributed to CEB</p> <p>Final SWFS distributed to MS as part of documents for UNEA2</p>	HLCP chair
May 2016	<p>SWFS considered by the UNEA2</p> <p>UNEA considers the SWFS and submission of the Strategy to the GA for its consideration and endorsement at its 2016 fall session (i.e. 71st session).</p>	<p>SWFS approved by the UNEA2</p>	<p>UNEP Team supported by the EMG Sec</p>
September 2016	<p>SWFS endorsed by the 71st session of the UNGA</p> <p>EMG SOM22 agrees on the modalities for follow up of the SWFS and reporting on its implementation</p> <p>(Parties and governing bodies of the MEAs and other EMG members</p>	<p>SWFS endorsed by the GA</p>	<p>EMG Sec UNEP team UNEP NY</p>

	can be informed of the outcome of the Process as appropriate)		
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