

Proposal for a Strategic Plan for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System

Executive Summary

This proposal provides the rationale for, and a step-by-step approach to, the implementation of a *Strategic Plan for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System*. It constitutes an essential part of the Framework for Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability of the UN System¹. A Strategic Plan for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System was requested by the Senior Officials Meeting of the UN Environment Management Group at their 16th meeting in September 2010. The Plan has been developed by the Issue Management Group on Sustainability Management in the UN (IMG), supported by the Sustainable United Nations facility (SUN).

Vision

The vision to which this Strategic Plan contributes is to enhance the environmental and social sustainability of the UN, thereby contributing to our mission to promote and protect human well-being in line with internationally agreed declarations, conventions and covenants.

Overall objective

The objective of the Strategic Plan is to provide a model for how the UN system can move towards realizing the above vision with regard to its in-house operations and practices, and with a primary focus on environmental sustainability. By suggesting a consistent and practical way to integrate sustainability management into individual UN organizations and into common functions of the UN system, the plan identifies key success factors for responding to the sustainability challenge in a cost efficient way that allows flexible implementation tailored to each specific organization.

¹ Refer to **A Framework for Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability of the UN System**. United Nations Environment Management Group 2011.

Outcomes

The expected outcomes from the implementation of this proposed Strategic Plan include:

1. A UN system that applies in its own operations the principles and conventions that it promotes, including Agenda 21.
2. A UN system where costs are responsibly contained by consistently minimizing waste of resources and optimizing efficiency in use of assets.
3. A UN system that embraces reform by applying a common and systematic approach to improved control, efficiency and reporting on resource use and other sustainability aspects.
4. A UN system that applies good business practices and makes use of modern solutions, including e-communication, to reduce negative sustainability impact, reduce costs, and improve efficiency in delivery of UN's mandates.
5. A UN system that leads by example and can support organizations outside the UN to follow suit.

Outputs

Implementation of this Strategic Plan would generate the following specific outputs:

1. Each UN organization will have a Sustainability Management System (SMS) to manage its sustainability impact. The SMS will allow the organization to identify, address, and report on the key environmental sustainability impacts from in-house operations (facilities, travel, communication, procurement, meetings.etc.). It will be based on a common model, so as to allow cooperation and sharing of resources across the UN system, but will also be flexible enough to allow adaptation to particular priorities and needs. Capacity building resources such as training, communications and documentation, will be an integral part of the SMS. The SMS will produce an Sustainability Action Plan, defining specific goals (e.g. reduction of energy use), supporting activities, responsibilities, implementation schedules, and associated costs/savings. The Sustainability Action Plan will be renewed every 48 months, and will be reviewed and approved by the relevant body in each organization before implementation.
2. A common function ("Sustainability Office") for the UN system will be established, to support interagency cooperation, carry out common functions such as tools development, advocacy and communication, reporting and training, and provide technical advice related to the implementation of the SMS in each organization. The Office would also participate in the development of and contribute to the collective actions in the Framework for Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability of the UN System.

Actions

The Strategic Plan defines action steps that need to be taken

1. by individual UN organizations, to establish their SMS:
 - a. Take a formal decision to establish an SMS in their own organization at a senior enough level to ensure that staff and funding can be allocated to this purpose.

- b. Develop and adopt a sustainability policy, defining the overarching priorities and objectives of the organization's sustainability work.
 - c. Assign senior level responsibility to ensure continuous attention to implementation of the sustainability policy.
 - d. Undertake an initial review of the organization's current sustainability impact, so as to allow comparison of existing facts with policy goals, and to provide a baseline against which to measure progress.
 - e. Develop a Sustainability Action Plan to define how to move from the current status to the goals of the sustainability policy. The Action Plan should specify, inter alia, who should do what, when, with what resources, to achieve what specific objectives. The plan should also define to whom and when progress should be reported.
 - f. Identify indicators to monitor progress of implementation of the Sustainability Action Plan. The Strategic Plan pre-defines three indicators (greenhouse gas emissions, water use, waste generation) that all UN organizations have to monitor and report on. Additional indicators can be adopted by each organization as fits their priorities.
 - g. Calculate expected costs and savings associated with implementation of the Sustainability Action Plan, and submit the Plan together with its budget for approval by relevant body.
 - h. Implement the Action Plan and renew after 48 months.
2. by the UN system jointly, tasked to the common Sustainability Office:
- a. Maintain a shared web platform where all UN organizations can exchange tools, resources and information, both with each other and with internal and external stakeholders.
 - b. Prepare an annual sustainability report for the UN system, providing UN agencies and external stakeholders the opportunity to take stock of plans, progress and challenges for the UN system's sustainability work.
 - c. Coordinate a network of designated focal points representing each organization in the UN system, to act as a forum for discussion, facilitate joint action and problem-solving regarding the UN system's sustainability efforts.
 - d. Operate a technical helpdesk to provide direct advisory and support services to the sustainability focal points in each UN organization.
 - e. Prepare awareness and training materials for sharing and use by all UN organizations.
 - f. Function as the contact point for interaction on sustainability issues with other interagency bodies and networks.
 - g. Operate an advisory service for sharing the UN's sustainability management experiences.

Mandate

Experiences from the implementation of the Climate Neutral Strategy for the UN system show that while much can be accomplished with good will and within existing resources, it is exceedingly difficult to promote an ongoing sustainability effort without a clear mandate. Such a mandate would allow sufficient resources to be allocated to make the initial investments required (in dedicated staff time and other) to generate the long-term savings generally associated with sustainability management. Although the rationale for adopting a sustainability

management approach is clear, very often the lack of an explicit mandate to support related action is a barrier to moving from talk to implementation. For this reason, the Strategic Plan proposes as a first step that each UN organization seek such a mandate from a sufficiently senior level, including their governing body if needed.

Costs savings and funding

A key rationale for adopting an integrated approach to sustainability management in the UN system, as proposed by this Strategic Plan, is to minimize costs by avoiding overlap of effort and optimizing efficiency in use of assets. The implementation of SMSs will require investments in terms of staff time, training and upgrading of facilities and equipment, but in most cases with an explicit expectation of reduced operational costs, which in the end should generate net savings for the organization.

In general terms the following costs can be anticipated for each adhering organization:

1. Setting up the organization-focused Sustainability Management Systems (SMS): Dedicated staff time to develop and propose to senior management various elements of the SMS, such as the initial review, the first organization-focused Sustainability Action Plan, monitoring indicators, and the reporting plan.
2. Implementation of such SMS: The costs and savings to be calculated for each action plan (covering 48 months) will depend on the priorities and level of ambition of the individual organization. The Sustainability Action Plan will be accompanied by its budget (costs and savings) to be approved by the relevant body.
3. Contribution to the common Sustainability Office: A rough estimate of costs for the Sustainability Office is US\$ 1 million/year (staff and operations). These costs could be shared among all participating UN organizations, which will be the main beneficiaries of the services provided. Alternatively, the costs could be covered by the UN Secretariat because of the catalytic role the Office will play and the commitment of the Secretary General toward system-wide sustainability. Thirdly, external funding could be sought from donors. The EMG Secretariat will explore these options in the course of 2012 and present them for decision at the next Senior Officials Meeting (SOM).

Conclusions

In order to realize the above proposal for a Strategic Plan for Sustainability Management in the United Nations system, the IMG recommends to EMG SOM the following decisions:

1. The senior officials also approve the Strategic Plan for Sustainability Management in the UN System, to move the UN system towards a consistent, systematic and cost-effective approach to sustainability management, and acknowledge the importance of a common UN-wide support to the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Senior officials request the EMG Secretariat to identify possible options for a common structure to support implementation of the strategic plan and for resourcing the structure's operation

2. The senior officials request the Chair to inform the Secretary General and the Chief Executive Board on the Strategic Plan to support establishment of Sustainability Management Systems in all UN organizations
3. The EMG members commit to implement organization-specific sustainability management systems (SMS) as outlined in the Strategic Plan and to designate appropriate funds for implementation. To this end, they agree to design their respective SMS, drawing on existing work (e.g. emission reduction strategies) and identifying required resources