



16th Senior officials meeting of the Environment Management Group

21 September 2010

Preparatory technical segment: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Senior officials segment: 4 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Hosted by the United Nations Division on Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA)

DC2 building, Two UN Plaza, 23rd floor, UNDESA meeting room,

New York

EMG/SOM.16/02

8 September 2010

Distribution: EMG members

Strategic directions for EMG: - the intergovernmental environmental agenda and the sustainability management and safeguards policies of the UN system

Note by the Chair

Introduction

1. The senior officials segment will under agenda item 3 consider for adoption the recommendations from the technical segment of the meeting on actions related to the ongoing work of EMG. The proposed actions are presented in document EMG.SOM.16/03, and include cooperation on biodiversity, land, green economy, international environmental governance, environmental and social safeguards, sustainable management, the 2011-2012 EMG work plan, reporting, and next meeting.

2. In building on the outcome of agenda item 3, senior officials are under agenda item 4 invited to consider the overall strategic directions for the work of the EMG. One action point considered under item 3 is to convene an extraordinary meeting of EMG senior officials just prior to the 2011 spring session of the UN Chief Executive Board (CEB) which will be held at the UN Headquarter in Nairobi. The purpose of this EMG meeting is to engage senior officials in a strategic discussion on key environmental challenges. Senior officials may therefore wish to identify issues which need further discussions at the extraordinary meeting of the EMG, and give directions as to how best such discussions should be prepared. Consideration may also be given to the need for other inter-agency bodies, such as the CEB, to consider EMG findings.

3. In order to prepare for such a discussion the senior officials segment is invited to consider the following two broad key questions:

A. How should the EMG contribute to the intergovernmental environmental agenda?

4. *Environmental change* poses an increasing risk to human wellbeing. A multi-sectoral approach is needed in order to turn this threat into opportunities for economic growth and job creation. The UN system is with its many institutional facets uniquely placed to contribute in this respect. Several calls have been made over the last year for the EMG to contribute to the intergovernmental environmental agenda, be it in the area of international environmental governance, biodiversity or land. The joint and broad environmental competence and capacity of the UN system is increasingly sought by member states.

5. *The international environmental agenda* will over the next year be characterised amongst others by the climate change negotiations under UN Framework Convention on Climate change (UNFCCC), the preparatory work for UNCSD in 2012 and the follow up to

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the new strategic plan on biodiversity for 2011-2020 and further work on combating desertification. Senior officials may wish to consider how cooperation under EMG can respond to multilateral and national needs of member states, and help ensure a high return on investments in the UN system.

6. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) - also referred to as 'Rio+20' - will be held in 2012. The Conference seeks three objectives: securing renewed political commitment to sustainable development, assessing the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments, and addressing new and emerging challenges. The Member States have agreed on the following two themes for the Conference: green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and institutional framework for sustainable development. The EMG is currently undertaking work on green economy and international environmental governance.

7. EMG has been invited by the Governing Council of UNEP to contribute to the work of the consultative group of ministers or high-level representatives which are considering the broader reform of *the international environmental governance* (IEG) system. It is proposed that EMG completes and approves the report 'Environment in the UN system' in time for twenty sixth session of UNEP Governing Council and the UNCSD prep com II. There may also be a need to follow up on any requests made to the EMG in the area of international environmental governance reform from the twenty-sixth session of UNEP Governing Council and the UNCSD prep com II. Issues which may warrant further consideration at the extraordinary meeting of the senior officials of the EMG in March 2011 are issues related to a common environmental strategy for the UN system and enhanced UN system cooperation in the area of science, and capacity building. Senior officials may also wish to devote specific attention to the *financing* of the environmental agenda in the light of issues emerging from the MEA negotiations, the fifth replenishment of the GEF and the consultations on IEG reform. Such issues include questions of how to ensure sufficient and predictable funding, coherence in the financing system, financial tracking and direct access to funds.

8. The issue management group on *green economy* is currently in the process of preparing a report which will complement reports that are already available and under preparation, including, for example, the UNEP Green Economy Report and the UNDG Guidance Note on Green Economy. Conceptual issues related to a green economy will be clarified in a report, which also will build a common vision and goals, provide an assessment of the EMG members experience to date in supporting this transition, identify key policy issues and opportunities and risks, bring a multi-sectoral perspective, and draw up areas for further work and partnership. A preliminary version of the report will be submitted to the second Preparatory Meeting of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, and could also serve as a foundation for a strategic discussion of the matter at the extraordinary meeting of the senior officials of the EMG in March 2010.

9. It is suggested that the senior officials meeting decides to continue the work of the issue management group (IMG) on *biodiversity* for another two years with a renewed mandate to implement the findings of the report "Advancing the biodiversity agenda, A UN system wide Contribution" and the statement by Executive Heads of EMG members. Furthermore it is suggested that the IMG respond to any requests made to it from the GA high-level event on biodiversity, the 10th COP of the CBD and the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. These requests are as of yet not decided upon and the senior officials may therefore want to requests the IMG provide an input to the extraordinary meeting of the senior officials of the EMG in March 2010, and give any further guidance to the IMG in this respect.

B. How can the UN build on its gains, and develop a more structured approach to the implementation of its sustainability management and safeguards policies?

10. A coherent conceptual, strategic, programmatic and operational approach across institutions can help ensure a high return on government *investments in environmental activities* in the UN system. A UN system which also practices what it preaches environmentally, both in terms of its management practices and in its wider operations would

help ensure that government investments in other areas of the multi-faceted UN system do not run counter to internationally agreed environmental goals.

11. The EMG consultative process on options for the development of a possible United Nations system-wide approach to *environmental and social safeguards* indicates that there is a need for a more systematic approach. A common approach could strengthen incentives, reduce costs and promote improved environmental and social performance throughout the UN system. Such a common and systemic approach, whereas placing emphasis on impact, transparency, accountability and sustainability, should not impose undue rigidity on UN agencies with different mandates, modes of operation and objectives. A common and flexible approach was therefore preferred to a harmonized approach.

12. There is an immediate need to further map, share information and raise awareness of how safeguards are applied in the UN system. In the longer term, the UN system may need to look at *the actual development and roll-out of common minimum procedures* to safeguard the environment and people. While EMG could focus on its environmental aspects, a counter part for social dimensions may be needed. In recognizing the complexity of the issue at hand, the consultation could be continued in close cooperation with the issue management group on sustainable management, in order to present the options for consideration by extraordinary meeting of the senior officials of the EMG in March 2011. Senior officials may wish to consider whether the work on safeguards should be become part of the work on sustainability management.

13. The UN system has made considerable headway towards *climate neutrality and sustainable management*. There is however still a need to explore how to anchor sustainable management in intergovernmental processes and the internal management and operational structures of the UN system. The IMG on Sustainability Management has agreed to develop a strategy to adopt a wider sustainability management approach, common to the UN system, but with enough flexibility to tailor to the needs of individual UN system organizations. Some common elements, including annual reporting, communications, and pooling of tools and resources which will need to be maintained as a common function for the UN system. The UN Climate Neutral Strategy, adopted by the Chief Executive Board in October 2007, provides a key element and first priority in this effort. Other elements will include the Emission Reduction plans, communications and reporting, sustainable procurement, and links with the UN Global compact. Senior officials may therefore want to request the IMG to prepare a strategic plan for sustainable management in the UN system for the consideration of the extraordinary meeting of the senior officials of the EMG in March 2011.