



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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20th Senior Officials' Meeting of the Environment Management Group 25 September 2014

Hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
2 UN Plaza E44th Street, New York, DC2-2330 Meeting room, 23rd floor
Preparatory technical segment: 9:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Senior officials' segment: 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.

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Distribution: EMG members

Strategic Directions for the EMG and its future work

Note by the Chair

Introduction

1. The Senior Officials, under agenda item 3, are invited to provide strategic directions for the future work of the EMG, promoting coherence within the UN system on the environment in light of the outcome document of the Rio+20 “The Future We Want”, the post 2015 development process and the outcome of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (UNEA).
2. The Senior Officials may also wish to recall the Secretary General’s call for a systematic and coordinated response by the UN system to the outcome document of the Rio+20, in particular with regard to the environmental sustainability agenda within the UN system.
3. It is proposed that the Senior Officials structure their discussion around the following issues emanating from the above-mentioned processes and the deliberations of the EMG technical segment:

1. A UN System-Wide Strategy on the Environment

Over the past four decades, environmental activities have become an increasingly integral component of the work of the wider UN system, 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 various governing bodies across the system.

These activities range from providing policy support and capacity building to member states, to integrating environmental sustainability into their own operations.

The increased focus on environmental issues in the UN system is a significant achievement and represents an important source of competence and capacity, but it also represents a governance challenge. Strategic approaches on the environment have been developed in many agencies as part of their overall strategic and programmatic frameworks. However, there is a need to further strengthen consistency across the system, in order to ensure the coherence of policy frameworks and of the delivery of UN system services to countries, with a view to strengthening their national capacities in an effective manner.

Member States in the outcome document of the Rio+20 , Paragraph 88, reaffirmed the need to strengthen international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development and called for empowering UNEP’s coordination role in the UN system to lead efforts to formulate UN system-wide strategies on the environment.

Following that the First Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (UNEA) in June 2014 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”¹.

Responding to that, an initial provisional Note (*Supporting Document II*) outlining the possible objectives, scope and a process for the preparation of a UN system-wide strategy has been shared by UNEP for consideration and comments of the EMG members.

The system-wide strategy would seek to formulate a medium- and long-term vision of the UN system’s work on environmental issues and within this framework to coalesce the various strategies in place in the different UN entities around shared policies and approaches.

The EMG members are invited to provide their help to set the parameters for a contemporary system-wide strategy for the environment including the most suitable approach for defining the strategy, for example a rights-based approach; an approach aimed at achieving climate neutrality or an approach aimed at defining the UN system’s specific contributions to the environmental dimension of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The senior officials are invited to engage in a discussion on this issue around the following questions :

1. What are the current gaps and challenges in the way UN entities implement or respond to their environment-related mandates/portfolios? How can these be addressed?
2. Are there significant areas of overlap among UN entities? How can a system-wide strategy help overcome these challenges?
3. What should be the scope and breadth of an UN system-wide strategy for the environment?
4. What would be the value added of such a system-wide strategy?
5. What should be its core elements?

¹ UNEA Resolution 1/11

6. How should it help harmonize the diverse activities of the UN system at different levels (policy formulation, country-level operations, advisory functions, etc.) ?
7. How can the EMG contribute most effectively to the different stages of the policy formulation process?
8. What challenges can a system wide strategy formulation anticipate? What lessons can be learned from previous experiences in order to avoid such challenges?

2. Increasing the effectiveness of the EMG in enhancing coordination on environmental issues in the UN System in the context of the post 2015 Development Agenda

In its Resolution on the EMG, the First Session of the UNEA invited the Executive Director of UNEP as Chair of the EMG, to identify possible measures to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Group in consultation with the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board, and to submit a report with recommendations to the UNEA for consideration at its second session. In response, the Senior Officials may wish to exchange views on the “effectiveness of the EMG” considering the following aspects:

a. Mandate and approach

The EMG was established in 1999 following the reform agenda of the then Secretary General of the UN to improve inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlements. The key expectations of the EMG when established were that it would enable the UN bodies and their partners to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives, contribute to a planning framework, and agree on priorities and on the respective roles of agencies in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of resources. The EMG was expected to provide a forum and mechanism to enhance complementarity between the analytical/normative activities and the operational role of the UN system agencies through adopting a problem-solving, results oriented approach. The reports of the Group would be made available to relevant intergovernmental bodies to enhance intergovernmental policy coherence.

In view of the above and the functioning of the EMG so far, the Senior Officials may wish to provide their assessment and constructive views on whether the EMG has been able to respond to the expectations and the coordination challenges in the field of environment in the UN system, in particular with regards to the following questions:

- i. Is the issue-based and time-bound approach sufficient and still suitable for addressing and responding to today’s coordination challenges and ensuring an appropriate response?
- ii. What should the criteria be for selecting issues for consideration of the EMG, and how should these issues be effectively identified and prepared? Should the issue-based and time-bound approach be

applied to all issues, and if not, what other forms of collaborative work could be considered?

- iii. Could some of the issues, especially in the field of UN environmental sustainability management, monitoring and reporting, benefit from a long-term approach in the form of technical advice and service to EMG members? If so, how could this aspect of the EMG's work best be organized and supported by its member agencies?
- iv. When and how should the reports of the EMG be communicated to the governing bodies of its members, or to other intergovernmental instances of the UN system?

b. Linkages with the wider coordination system including the CEB

A discussion by the Senior Officials is proposed on how the work of the EMG could be more effectively and systemically linked to and serve the agenda of the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB) and its subsidiary bodies, or other coordination mechanisms within the UN system. A good example of such cooperation is the recent decision of the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the CEB on working with the EMG on developing and implementing Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in the UN System.

The Senior Officials may wish to consider the following issues:

- i. How should the EMG interface with the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its main committees, or with any other coordination mechanisms of the UN system, such as the UN Development Group (UNDG)?
- ii. How to ensure that environmental dimensions and responses prepared under the EMG are followed up and systematically taken into account in all planning processes, ensuring mainstreaming of the environment across sectors and at all levels?
- iii. Can the approach to collaboration with the HLCM on the EMS be replicated with the High Level Committee on Program (HLCP) in other areas to enhance coherence in the formulation of environmental policies (including work in the area of norms and standards)? Can the EMG play a role in strengthening cooperation on programming environmental activities at the national level through cooperation with the UN Development Group?

c. Fitness for purpose and contribution to the Post 2015 development agenda

The Senior Officials may wish to provide their views on the effectiveness of the EMG in coordinating environmental sustainability issues in the context of the post 2015 Development Agenda, in terms of its ability, capacity, approach and working modalities. Taking into account the mandate and approach set out in the decision establishing the EMG in 1999 and considering subsequent developments, is the EMG fit for purpose of serving cross-cutting environmental issues of the post-2015 Development Agenda? If not, what amendments to its mandate or working modalities could be envisaged?