



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP



<p>26th Senior Officials Meeting of the United Nations Environment Management Group</p> <p>Senior Segment, 28th October 2020 (14:00 -15:30 GVA time) Online</p>	<p>EMGSOM.26_5</p> <p>Distribution: EMG Members</p>
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Background note: Covid-19 and the environment, opportunities for collaboration in the UN system

Summary:

This note has been prepared to stimulate a strategic discussion by the EMG Senior Officials at their 26th meeting on the UN system’s response to COVID-19 from an environmental perspective.

The UN Secretary-General has underlined the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as key frameworks for a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. In his call for solidarity in battling the pandemic, the Secretary-General urged the world to keep its commitments to people and the planet, acknowledging the shared responsibility to “recover better”, with more inclusive and sustainable models of development. The Secretary-General thus echoed the strong correlation between an effective response to COVID-19 and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals including combatting climate change and biodiversity loss and protecting human rights.

In response to the Secretary-General’s call, many UN entities have prepared policy, programme and operational responses to help countries recover and rebuild a more resilient and sustainable society and economy. The UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, developed by the UN Sustainable Development Group, provides the frame for integrated UN support to countries and societies in the face of COVID-19, emphasizing environmental sustainability as imperative for building back better.

A quick look at UN COVID-19 responses with focus on their environmental dimensions, shows how a diverse set of responses have been prepared in relation to the SDGs and the respective mandates of UN agencies. The nature of these responses includes provisions of awareness raising, tracking and analysis of the pandemic’s impact and guidance on recovery and building back better. Most of the identified responses focus on mitigating the pandemic’s impacts on land, water, production and consumption, sanitation, cities, climate, and biodiversity. While the diverse and numerous engagements of UN entities affirm their commitment to the environment in their respective constituencies, there is potential for

strengthened collaboration to ensure an integrated and coherent response in their future efforts. In other words, while agencies understandably need to respond to the expectations of their respective constituencies, it remains important to ensure these efforts take an integrated rather than sectoral approach, where the environmental dimension is mainstreamed at country, regional and global levels.

In the context of the above, the 26th meeting of the EMG Senior Officials provides an opportunity to consider opportunities for collaboration from an environmental perspective as well as ways in which the EMG could support ongoing efforts within the UN system. As an environmentally focused interagency mechanism, the EMG could, for instance, add value by bringing evidence, knowledge and expertise together to support UN Country Teams and Regional collaboration platforms in developing COVID recovery packages. Senior Officials are invited to share their perspectives around the following questions:

- ***Training and information sharing:*** What are the substantive or nexus areas where EMG members could collaborate to bridge the gap between UN system expertise and operational needs?

A series of thematic and/or regional nexus dialogues could be organised to further inform and raise awareness of the environment dimension of COVID recovery packages, for example with the Resident Coordinator Offices. These could be organized around specific issues, with a view to later develop them into issue management processes.

- ***Knowledge broker and matchmaking:*** At the next level of support, how can the EMG serve as a knowledge and expertise broker to advance the integration of the environment in COVID recovery packages, and facilitate the dissemination of technical resources across the UN system?

Links could be established to the regional issues-based coalitions, regional collaboration platforms and support global initiatives.

As a proposed outcome of the discussion, it is suggested that the Senior Officials agree to establish a task team to identify opportunities for collaboration to strengthen the integration of environmental considerations in COVID-19 recovery approaches.