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ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP



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Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure

Proposal

Background

Infrastructure is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While only explicitly referred to under SDG 9, infrastructure either directly or indirectly influences the attainment of all the SDGs.

The OECD has estimated that US\$6.9 trillion will need to be invested in infrastructure every year to achieve the SDGs by 2030.¹ This will be even more significant in the post-COVID-19 context, as infrastructure investments are likely to play an important role in the socio-economic recovery and government stimulus packages. Since infrastructure assets are typically designed to last for decades, it is critical that these investments are channelled into sustainable infrastructure systems, otherwise they risk “locking in” unsustainable choices and undermining the SDGs.

“Business-as-usual” approaches to infrastructure development have proven to be unable to deliver sustainable infrastructure at the scale required. For infrastructure to deliver on the SDGs, sustainability must be integrated into decision-making from the earliest stages of planning, and in a way that considers infrastructure and the natural environment as a “system-of-systems”.

In February 2019 the EMG hosted a Nexus Dialogue on sustainable infrastructure and the SDGs. The dialogue contributed to a common understanding amongst participants on the centrality of infrastructure to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and fostered support by both public and private stakeholders for the application of an integrated approach to the planning and development of infrastructure. The meeting produced an [outcome statement](#) in which participants invited the EMG to further engage the UN system and other relevant stakeholders to promote integrated approaches to sustainable infrastructure.

¹ OECD (2018). Investing in Climate, Investing in Growth: A Synthesis. p. 13.
<https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/g20-climate/synthesis-investing-in-climate-investing-in-growth.pdf> Note: this figure includes only investments in four sectors: energy, transport, water, and telecoms. The amount of infrastructure investment needed for achieving the SDGs will be significantly higher and include additional sectors.

Building on this momentum, in March 2019, the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) passed a [resolution](#) on sustainable infrastructure (UNEP/EA.4/L.5) that recognizes infrastructure's centrality to the 2030 Agenda. It encourages Member States to develop and strengthen national and regional systems-level strategic approaches to infrastructure planning, promotes nature-based solutions and encourages the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support countries in building the technical and institutional capacity to develop sustainable infrastructure.

The EMG midterm meeting in April 2020 suggested that an EMG process on sustainable infrastructure be created to follow up on the UNEA resolution and the findings of the nexus dialogue.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE EMG CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

Based on the outcome of the EMG Nexus Dialogue on sustainable infrastructure and EMG Members' shared interest and expertise in sustainable infrastructure, Consultative Process is proposed that would strengthen the coordination of UN-system support to Member States in developing the sustainable infrastructure that is required to deliver on the Paris Agreement and achieve the SDGs.

The process is envisioned to include the following:

- a) EMG Members' review of the draft Good Practice Guidance Framework for Sustainable Infrastructure and provision of written comments.
- b) Compilation of a library of sustainable infrastructure knowledge products, tools, and policy guidance that has been created by the participating organizations.
- c) Preparation and maintenance of a consolidated calendar of UN events and international policy processes in the lead-up to UNEA-5 in February 2021 that are related or relevant to sustainable infrastructure.
- d) Provision of coordinated inputs into relevant events and policy processes, where opportunities exist.
- e) A follow-up meeting to the EMG Nexus Dialogue on sustainable infrastructure, with a proposed focus on how sustainable infrastructure can deliver on SDGs while stimulating economies and building resilience of infrastructure systems in the post-COVID context.

Suggested Actions

The EMG Senior Officials:

- a) Agree to establish a Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure to strengthen the coordination of UN-system support to Member States in this area of work;
- b) Request the EMG Secretariat to facilitate the establishment of the IMG and to support its work.