

Terms of Reference: EMG Consultative Process on the Environment and the Covid-19 recovery

Background

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 been engaged within their respective mandates to support countries in responding to the pandemic and in guiding their recovery efforts. While these efforts are multiplying, it is important to ensure they are continued in informed, coherent, integrated and effective manner at global, regional and national levels.

In that context, and in addressing the environmental dimensions of the Covid-19, the EMG Senior Officials in their 26th annual meeting shared their perspectives on how to maintain and accelerate the SDGs environmental sustainability goals while developing the recovery and building back efforts and how to ensure integrity of recovery policies and plans with the environmental sustainability goals under the SDGs.

In that regard they decided to establish a consultative process to help the UN system define a coherent approach and identify opportunities for collaboration on a green recovery seizing the opportunities created by the pandemic and based on the lessons learned from it regarding the interactions of human with nature.

Objectives and Scope

Building on the shared perspectives of the Senior Officials, the consultative process is proposed to envisage the following objectives and scope for its work:

- 1) Define a common narrative for a green recovery in line with the SDGs

In responding to the pandemic and in developing recovery policy and plans, it is imperative to ensure the integrity and harmony of these policies and plans with the SDGs and their environmental dimensions. In that regard, it is timely for the UN system to sharpen its understanding of the analytical and the narrative elements of an “inclusive green recovery”, building on its past work on the interface of the environment and the economy. Such a narrative will help to pursue an integrated, healthy and sustainable recovery approach that is resilient, inclusive, sustainable and efficient. The consultative process can prepare the narrative as a frame within which the UN agencies can all speak to as they engage through their different mandates. In developing such a narrative, it is important to look into the opportunities created by the pandemic such as digitalisation, that could give a new momentum to the SDGs implementation but could also pose a risk to the environment and the human rights, for example, in terms of access to data, data protection, digital divide, access to technology and cyber crimes. It is also important to capitalise on the lessons learned from the pandemic on the importance of keeping the harmony between human health and nature sustainability. It is necessary that the future investments

for recovery recognize the unsustainable use of natural resources, nature destruction, and biodiversity loss as a potential cause of zoonotic diseases that threaten human health and socio-economic conditions with major implications for disadvantaged communities, women, and children.

- 2) Facilitate a dialogue, information and science and policy exchange on the Covid-environment nexus issues

The consultative process can provide a platform for dialogue and building partnerships around some key Covid-environment nexus themes such as:

- waste, pollution and health
- human and nature rights, human development and gender equality
- recovery through green fiscal and financial packages
- food security

- 3) Identifying gaps and opportunities for collaboration in science, policy and implementation

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 the 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 a need to identify the gaps to be bridged and take advantage of the potential to strengthen the collaboration of UN entities and ensure an integrated, coherent and proactive 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 are not isolated but integrated and scaled to support country, regional and global efforts. Supporting and building on the current initiatives¹, a review of the current responses could inform policy and programme decisions and opportunities for cooperation in the future. Provisions that would benefit from a collaborative approach could include science-policy dialogues, coherent messaging, continued tracking of the pandemic's impacts and capacity building for recovery and building back better.

Composition

With leading role of entities such as UNEP, UNDP and ILO, the consultative process will be composed of focal points nominated by EMG members. Meetings will be organized by the EMG Secretariat primarily through electronic means. Meetings may be open to observers from non-UN entities whose knowledge,

¹ Such as UNEP-Oxford University partnership, under the aegis of the Green Fiscal Policy Network. (IMF, GIZ and UNEP)

activities or expertise will be relevant and useful to the work of the consultative process. UNEP and ILO will co-chair the Consultative Process.

Timeline

Possible activities/outputs	2021			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First meeting of the consultative process to finalize and agree on ToR - Developing roadmap for 20201 with key priorities 	■			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft the narrative on green recovery 		■		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping of UN agencies programs, initiatives, guidance documents and other tools on Covid response and recovery 		■		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of an analysis on gaps and opportunities for collaboration response and green recovery including through focused thematic dialogues 			■	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report on progress to EMG Senior Officials 				■

Resources

It is suggested to recruit a consultant who would support the EMG secretariat to facilitate the work of the consultative process. The consultant will take the lead role in drafting of the respective documents of the process and coordination of the meetings. The work of the consultative process will build on the existing resources and initiatives of the UN agencies such as UNEP, ILO, UNDP and others to ensure complementarity and added value.