

Terms of Reference for the EMG Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure

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.¹

The OECD has estimated that US\$6.9 trillion will need to be invested in infrastructure every year to achieve the SDGs by 2030.² This will be even more significant in the COVID-19 recovery context, as infrastructure investments will 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.

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 and promotes nature-based solutions. It also requests UNEP to build on the work of the UN regional commissions and other UN bodies, drawing on existing initiatives and identifying knowledge gaps, to assist Member States in promoting and strengthening the sustainability of their infrastructure.

In November 2020 the EMG Senior Officials agreed to establish a Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure to strengthen the coordination of UN-system support to Member States in this area of work, and requested the EMG Secretariat to facilitate its establishment.

¹ Thacker, S., Adshead, D., Morgan, G., Crosskey, S., Bajpai, A., Ceppi, P. et al. *Infrastructure: Underpinning Sustainable Development*. Copenhagen, Denmark: UNOPS; 2018. Available from: https://content.unops.org/publications/Infrastructure_underpinning_sustainable_development_EN.pdf?mtime=20200416084541

² 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.

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, the Consultative Process will deliver the following outputs:

- a) EMG Members' review of the [International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure](#) and provision of written comments, with a view to endorsement as a UN-wide framework, either in its current form, or as a revised document with increased scope and ambition.
- b) Compilation of sustainable infrastructure tools from UN bodies in support of Member States' implementation of the *International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure* - to be integrated into existing [Sustainable Infrastructure Tool Navigator](#) Platform, as applicable.
- c) Preparation and maintenance of a consolidated calendar of UN events and international policy processes in the lead-up to UNEA-5.2 in February 2022 that are related or relevant to sustainable infrastructure and identification of opportunities for engagement with those processes.
- d) Ongoing 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 COVID-19 recovery context.

These deliverables will be produced by the EMG Secretariat based on inputs provided by the participants in the Consultative Process. The process will follow the timeline indicated below.

PROPOSED TIMELINE

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Introductory meeting of focal points to discuss existing work on sustainable infrastructure and planned activities under Consultative Process	17 March 2021
First edition of the <i>International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure</i> shared with EMG members, call for relevant sustainable infrastructure tools and calendar of sustainable infrastructure events and processes	21 March 2021
Deadline for submitting feedback on the <i>International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure</i>	21 May 2021
Deadline for provision of sustainable infrastructure tools to accompany <i>International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure</i>	21 May 2021
Compilation of sustainable infrastructure tools for integration into existing platform under development	21 June



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG



Activity	Dates
EMG event on sustainable infrastructure in the COVID-19 recovery context (virtual or in-person, as necessary)	November 2021
Launch of the second edition of the <i>International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure</i> at UNEA-5.2 (tbc)	February 2022
Provision of coordinated inputs into relevant events and policy processes, where opportunities exist, and of complementary tools and guidance – meeting where necessary/appropriate	Ongoing