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ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP



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Proposal

Environmental Data and Statistics for the SDGs

Objective

Strengthen interagency collaboration on environmental data and statistics for the SDGs with the goals of: exploring the interlinkages between the environmental and the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development; and identifying additional data that must be produced, as well as environmental indicators that must be disaggregated, to enable more advanced analyses on these interlinkages. This will contribute to the achievement of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and provide guidance on the requirements for a post-2030 sustainable development framework.

Background

The UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-2025 emphasizes the role UNEP is to play in filling the gaps in environmental data and statistics, particularly related to the Sustainable Development Goals and to enhance capacity to use environmental data for monitoring progress and using integrated analyses of interventions toward the achievement of the SDGs and other globally-agreed environmental goals.¹

UNEP's recent [Measuring Progress](#) report reveals that country capacity to collect the data to populate those indicators is sorely deficient, with 53 of 92 environment-related indicators lacking sufficient data to track progress. The report also highlights the need to produce more disaggregated data, as well as to develop abilities to analyse existing data for interlinkages across the three pillars of sustainable development.

¹ Paragraph 20 of the MTS sets forth an objective around capitalizing on the Environmental Management Group to maximize our common efforts to collect and use SDG indicators: "High-quality, credible, open, shared, sex-disaggregated environmental data, assessments and expertise are critical to supporting integration efforts across the United Nations system [and] (b) enhancing, through the Environmental Management Group, multilateral environmental agreements and multi-agency collaboration, the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment and environmental indicators and monitoring, and scaling up actions informed by environmental statistics and science, including through integrated analyses across the three pillars of sustainable development."

UNEP is one of a number of UN agencies tasked as custodians of environment-related SDG indicators. However, the UN system looks to UNEP to enhance the use of environmental data across the UN system to inform policy makers and to guide the design of interventions so as to maximize impact across all three sustainable development pillars. There are existing efforts to produce more sophisticated environmental data, statistics and indicators to put environmental knowledge on par with our understanding of the economic and social dimensions. However, there remains a need to develop new tools and methodologies for teasing out interlinkages and causal relations across the three pillars, from the environmental perspective. The demand for this is growing. For example, UNEP has received requests from agencies as diverse as UN Women, the ILO and UNDP to collaborate in explorations of interlinkages between environment and gender, employment and environmental sustainability and environment and human development, respectively.

As the UN system moves toward the mid-point review of the SDGs and the development of a post-2030 framework, it will need knowledge about where measures can be taken to more effectively secure the environmental dimension within the overarching sustainable development system. The EMG offers a channel through which the UN system can think collectively about interlinkages with the economic and social pillars of sustainable development. Understanding these interlinkages will produce better guidance both for achieving the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and for thinking through the requirements for a post-2030 sustainable development framework.

There is a wealth of potential to be mined through the EMG: sharing of lessons and tools for promoting, within the UN system and at national levels, analyses of interlinkages and collective efforts to develop new methodologies for data analysis that utilize cutting-edge artificial intelligence and other digital tools.

Activities and scope

An indicative list of potential activities and outputs can be imagined as follows:

- Joint efforts to raise awareness of the need for better and more disaggregated data and indicators in the run up to the post-2030 agenda negotiations (to further improve use of indicators to optimize interlinkages across all three pillars of sustainable development in the development of a post-2030 framework).
- Analysis of current sets of environment-related indicators (SDG Indicators, Global Set of Climate Statistics and Indicators, Global Biodiversity Framework Indicators, etc.) against those impact and causality questions most requiring attention to guide the design of effective interventions to achieve the SDGs.
- Identification of priority gaps in data sets and national data capacities that need to be filled to produce indicators for analyses to guide effective SDG interventions.
- Identification of potential joint capacity development undertakings (likely under the auspices of the Economic Commissions) that facilitate the use of analyses of interlinkages.
- Manuals and other guidance for governments and UN agencies to enhance their use of analyses of interlinkages in their assessments and in the development of their programmes.
- Knowledge-sharing of innovative methodologies (particularly those leveraging digital tools) that enhance analyses of SDG indicator interlinkages to measure impacts of interventions to meet SDG targets.

The EMG could support an approach to systemically and consistently uptake information from, and stimulate collaboration, across the UN system to analyse progress, address gaps, identify emerging tools and practices on environmental SDG statistics. As such, the EMG will support the implementation of the Framework for System Wide Strategies on the Environment (SWFS) adopted by UN agencies following the UNEA resolution 1/11 and the Rio+20 outcome document requesting the EMG to: ensure follow up of the environmental dimensions of the SDGs, secure alignment of agencies policies and programs with the environmental dimensions, reporting on the environmental dimensions and building possibilities for collaboration. Ultimately, the EMG will provide practical input into the mid-point review of the SDGs and guidance for the development of a post-2030 framework.