

Draft Outline: Options Paper on system-wide Issues in the Follow up of the Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system

Summary :

This note is prepared by the EMG “Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System” for consideration of the 19th senior officials meeting of the EMG to support their discussion on system-wide issues in the follow up of the Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system (Sustainability Framework). It contains a short background of the Consultative Process and its achievements so far, including the Framework, and the need for such a Framework, especially for following up of the Rio+20 outcome document. The note, including the table in Annex 1 then suggests options for follow up to the Sustainability Framework. These concern reporting to Member States, potential roles of existing UN interagency mechanisms and a new system-wide hub for coordination of future activities to ensure more balanced considerations of environmental and social sustainability. The new hub will facilitate exchange of lessons learned, capacity building, awareness raising and reporting on progress to member states, including possibly through the SG’s report on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development within the UN system, the High Level Political Forum, the UN Environment Assembly of UNEP and other relevant fora.

The note has received comments so far from UNEP, UNDP, UNDESA, UN HQ Secretariat and the CEB Secretariat.

1. Purpose:

To provide options for consideration by the 19th EMG senior officials meeting and beyond on moving the UN Sustainability Framework forward at the system-wide level. Specifically to propose options related to the potential roles of various inter-agency mechanisms including for future anchoring of the Framework in the UN system - and to address the need for system-wide commitment, reporting to member states, knowledge sharing, monitoring and evaluation, and support for system-wide accountability.

2. Background of the EMG Consultative Process and the development of the Sustainability Framework

A) Defining the Sustainability Framework

The fifteenth meeting of the EMG senior officials meeting (SOM) in September 2009 decided to undertake a consultative process through a working group to prepare a report that outlines options for the development of a possible UN system-wide approach to “environmental and social safeguards” based on a review of existing policies and guidelines. The decision was made in response to several requests by EMG members in the lead-up to the meeting and in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit which called for system-wide coherence and actions to strengthen linkages between the normative and

operational work of the United Nations. UNDP and UNEP were asked to co-chair the consultative process.

The working group met in the form of a workshop on safeguards at the World Bank in June 2010 and considered the main opportunities and challenges related to environmental and social safeguards in the UN system, learning from the Bank's experiences in environmental and social safeguards. The workshop agreed on a process for preparing an approach to safeguards in the UN, including by establishing a drafting group. A gap-analysis was carried out by the drafting group, and they also identified common principles, procedures and technical guidance within the UN system that potentially could be used to develop a common approach on safeguards.

By the decision of the 16th SOM in September 2010, a mapping and inter-agency review of existing practices and policies pertaining to social and environmental performance in the UN system was prepared.

The second consultative meeting in March 2011 (Geneva) considered the findings of the inter-agency review; a revision of the conceptual framework for environmental and social safeguards; and options for a common UN approach. A key outcome of this meeting was to change the terminology from "environmental and social safeguards" to "environmental and social sustainability framework" (which includes safeguards as one of several possible instruments that can be used) to more accurately reflect an approach that is inclusive of the diversity of UN entities, flexible and goes beyond the "do no harm" principle. The subsequent meeting of the drafting group in June 2011 in Rome included organizations who were developing or revising their institutional safeguards: FAO, IFAD, and the World Bank; and the IMG on environmental sustainability management, to ensure coordination and synergy.

The result of these consultative meetings led to the development of the Sustainability Framework as presented in the report "*A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System*,"¹ which also includes the joint heads of agencies statement in support of the Consultative Process and the Framework.

The recommended approach in the Sustainability Framework is flexible and phased but ensures a minimum level of real engagement by all, while allowing each agency to implement the Sustainability Framework in a manner appropriate to its circumstances. The Framework proposes: 1) a common vision, rationale and objective; 2) individual actions to be taken by each UN entity to internalize environmental and social sustainability measures; and 3) collective actions for the system to undertake, such as a support and knowledge sharing function, minimum requirements, and a centralized reporting structure.

SOM 17 endorsed the Sustainability Framework and through the EMG chair submitted it to the Secretary-General as well as to the preparatory process for the UNCSD as the EMG contribution. At the same time the Chair brought the issue to the attention of the CEB through its High-level Committees on programmes and management, HLCP and HLCM, in April 2012.

B) [Supporting implementation of the Framework](#)

The Consultative Process was extended by the 17th SOM to support the implementation of the Framework by developing a community of good practice to share knowledge and lessons learned; to explore options for issues under consideration, such as a common support and knowledge sharing

¹ <http://unemg.org/index.php/2013-04-23-13-07-55/20-issue-management-groups/environmental-and-social-sustainability>

function; accountability; and identification of ways to go beyond managing risks and benefits and also “do good” and identify options to ensure comparable social expertise to complement the environmental competence held by EMG members.

SOM 18 in November 2012 welcomed the progress made by each agency in internalizing the Sustainability Framework and agreed to continue this process to help translating the policy-level Sustainability Framework into a roadmap (guide) that will help clarify elements in the Sustainability Framework essential for its implementation and for a common approach. The senior officials also agreed to recommend to the first CEB meeting in 2014, or earlier, the transfer of the Framework and its implementation to the CEB. It should be borne in mind, however, that CEB as the highest level coordination body of the UN system bringing together 29 Executive Heads of UN system organizations under the leadership of the Secretary-General, seeks to strengthen policy coherence and coordination among UN system organizations. In doing so, CEB does not develop, implement or monitor policies and cannot, therefore, be tasked with implementation.

C) The Retreat of the Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability

A retreat of the Consultative Process was held from 3-5 June 2013, at Bogis-Bossey, Switzerland to follow up on the decisions of the SOM 18. The retreat brought together representatives from 32 UN entities, international organizations and academia to exchange lessons and good practices in integrating environmental and social sustainability, discuss elements that are key for the further development and implementation of the Sustainability Framework, provide inputs to a draft Guide for implementation of the Framework and provide suggestions on the system wide follow up of the Framework.

The key suggestions of the retreat included:

- a) The Guide for implementation of the Sustainability Framework should provide guidance on how individual entities could move ahead in implementing the Sustainability Framework. It should be an interim guide based on common experiences and practices of the UN agencies. It should mention the achievements made so far, be easy to read, communicable and structured in 3 sections:
 - ❖ Advocacy tool: A brief section that could be used to build awareness and convince various stakeholders.
 - ❖ How to get started: A section that briefly explains the basic steps to get started in implementing the Sustainability Framework
 - ❖ The Building Blocks for Operationalizing the Framework
- b) The Consultative Process could agree on a set of core values that could be applied across the UN system, for example “do no harm” and “do good”, while individual UN entities could elaborate it further with entity specific Principles. The Drafting Group was tasked to lead the development of this set of common core values, which could be integrated in the interim Guide for implementation of the Sustainability Framework. This guide should be tested out for three years and then reviewed.
- c) An Options Paper should be developed, to outline options on the follow up of the Sustainability Framework, its placement and implementation by the UN system. The paper should be prepared by the drafting group of the consultative process in consultation with the CEB secretariat and UNDESA. (NOTE: This paper is the follow-up to this action item.)

- d) The Options Paper as well as the Guide for the UN Sustainability Framework should be prepared for consideration by the 19th EMG SOM. A high profile launch of the next phase of implementation of the Sustainability Framework can be planned, including the possibility for the SG to send a letter to Heads of Agencies or few Heads of Agencies making a joint launch.
- e) To understand and follow up on legal issues related to the implementation of the Sustainability Framework, World Bank, with support from EMG Secretariat, can facilitate a meeting between the legal team of the World Bank safeguards group and the Office of Legal Affairs as well as the co-chairs.
- f) Possible roles for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the UN Evaluations Group (UNEG) in ensuring monitoring and evaluation of the Framework were discussed. The two entities could be invited to join the consultative process and to take the framework into account when carrying out their respective functions.
- g) With regard to accountability, it was also discussed that the Ombudsman and Human Rights Rapporteurs could be invited to take the Framework into account when carrying out their respective functions.
- h) Members of the Consultative Process will be given access to the Teamworks space, hosted by UNDP, to provide a platform and network for sharing knowledge and experiences.
- i) In light of the Framework's broad scope and in support of the decision of the 18th EMG senior officials meeting to advance follow-up and implementation of the Framework, options for applying the Framework throughout the UN system need to be further explored. EMG has a continuing role to play in furthering the Framework and to serve as a learning and knowledge sharing platform for sustainability practitioners. The UN system Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) is the highest level coordination body of the UN system. CEB seeks to strengthen policy coherence and coordination among UN system organizations. In doing so, CEB does not develop, implement or monitor policies. Under the auspices of CEB's High-Level Committees (HLCP, HLCM), a variety of system-wide contributions have been developed through an inter-agency consultative process using a lead agency approach, including joint statements, joint reports and system-wide action plans.
- j) The SG's report on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the UN system refers to the Framework as a good basis for developing a road map for accelerating integration of sustainable development in the UN system. This can be a good opportunity for placing the framework in the core of reporting by the SG on sustainability within the UN system.

3. Possible role/contribution of UN inter-agency mechanisms and other internal bodies in taking the Sustainability Framework forward (Options)

The Sustainability Framework seeks to enhance the environmental and social sustainability of activities carried out by UN system organizations in the areas of policy/ strategy ,program/projects and management(facilities/ operations?). UN inter-agency mechanisms that serve as conveners and fora for coordination, such as CEB and its subsidiary bodies HLCP and HLCM, play a role in promoting policy coherence, programmatic coordination, knowledge sharing etc ., but are not vehicles for implementation and monitoring. While all these mechanisms will have a role to play, taking the Framework forward would also require a new coordination hub to keep track of this support for implementation, support the continued Consultative Process , maintain the exchange of lessons learned and capacity building and contribute to the reporting to Member States on the Framework, possibly through the SG's report on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development within the UN system.

A provisional list of relevant interagency mechanisms and other internal UN bodies, their mandates and potential role in the further development and implementation of the Framework including with regard to possibly providing a "new hub" for the system-wide consultative process is provided in Annex 1

which lists 10 options (OPTION 4-13) in that regard. While there would appear to be potential roles for all the listed inter-agency mechanisms (CEB, HLCP, HLCM, UNDG, ECESA+, EMG) vis a vis the Framework, the logical options for a “new hub” appear to be either under or ECESA+. Please consult Annex 1 for further details.

An issue that should be taken into consideration when assessing the various options presented in the table and elsewhere in this note is the recommendation of the SG’s mainstreaming report that “a roadmap for accelerating the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the UN system would provide a useful framework for action. This could involve recommendations for developing a framework based on the Environment and Social Sustainability Framework initiated by the EMG.” To further synergies, avoid overlap and duplication, the development of such a roadmap and the Consultative Process would benefit from being hosted by the same inter-agency mechanism. **Finding a “new hub” for the Sustainability Framework could be linked with a decision on whether and where to develop the roadmap suggested by the SG to accelerate the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the UN system (OPTION 14)**

4. Sustainability Framework and reporting to member states on Sustainable Development in the UN system

Several global summits, the most recent being the Rio+20 and its outcome document, have reinforced the importance that UN Member States place on the concept of sustainable development and its uptake and implementation. In the context of the Council of the Global Environment Facility, Member States have also pushed for the internal uptake in the UN by making funding conditional on implementing agencies putting in place environmental and social safeguards.

The UN system has an important role to play in helping countries to define and implement their pathways towards sustainable development. However, as pointed out in the SG’s report on mainstreaming sustainable development in the UN system², using an integrated and sustainable approach or decision-making in the UN system is currently unevenly applied, revealing an institutional gap between policy and practice. The Sustainability Framework can help close this gap.

The development of the UN Sustainability Framework was timely as it coincided with Member States preparations to renew the sustainable development agenda in Rio+20 where they called on the UN system to further mainstream sustainable development throughout the UN system and requested the Secretary General to report to the GA on progress made in this regard³. The SG’s report on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the UN system, which is expected to be one of the recurrent reports to the High Level Political Forum, references and partly builds on the Sustainability Framework. The report was drafted by DESA with inputs from ECESA+. This SG’s report presents a good opportunity for placing the Sustainability Framework in the core of reporting by the SG on sustainable development within the UN system. Member States are expected to respond to the report at the next session of the UN General Assembly. **Reporting on the Sustainability Framework could be a standard element of the SG’s report which would then become the main or primary vehicle for reporting on the Framework to Member States and for receiving their guidance and feed-back (OPTION 1)**

² <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1799sgreport.pdf>

³ paragraphs 93-96 of the outcome document as well as paragraphs 57, 78, 79, 82,

The Rio+20 also established the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). According to the modalities subsequently agreed by UNGA, the HLPF will conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives within the context of the post-2015 development agenda. The reviews will be voluntary and include Member States and relevant UN entities. **The Sustainability Framework could be part of the HLPF reviews of UN system commitments (OPTION 2)**

The UNEP Governing Council and now the UN Environment Assembly of UNEP have received progress reports on the preparation of the Framework as part of the regular EMG report. **Reporting on relevant elements of the Sustainability Framework could continue as part of reporting by the Executive Director of UNEP on UNEP system-wide coordination mandate on environmental sustainability (OPTION 3)**

5. Secretariat

The “new hub” would need to provide secretarial support to the Consultative Process going forward.

The EMG Secretariat has been providing secretarial support since the inception of the Consultative Process in 2009. The support of the Secretariat has comprised the following tasks/services:

- Organization of meetings (consultative process and the drafting group meetings) and supporting the Co-Chairs - so far (since 2010) three meetings of the Consultative Process, two meetings of the drafting group, and some six teleconferences over the latter/ year.
- Preparing documentation for the above meetings.
- Reporting on progress to EMG SOM and UNEP Governing Council.
- Coordination and publication of ESS report including the Framework, SG’s Statement and the ESS survey in the UN.
- Drafting ToR and hiring consultants for specific tasks such as background papers for the the Consultative Process and the Survey.
- Communication and outreach through the EMG website by making available the reports, papers and experiences of UN agencies on ESS and creating web-space for sharing knowledge.

On a number of issues, the Secretariat has been working very closely with members of the drafting group and received their in kind support as well as financial support. For example, UNDP funded a consultant to support the development of the Framework. Knowledge sharing will also be an important system-wide need to be supported by a Secretariat. Currently, the EMG Secretariat is working closely with UNDP which is hosting and leading the development of a system-wide platform in Teamworks for knowledge sharing on the Sustainability Framework.

6. Summary of Options and Recommendations for Way Forward

1. Following the EMG SOM19 in September 2013, the Chair of EMG may forward this Options Paper including Annex 1 to the chairs of ECESA+, HLCP, HLCM, and UNDG inviting them to consider the options as summarized below within their respective groups and provide any relevant input or views. Based on the feed-back, EMG will revise the Options Paper to include recommendations concerning the division of labour with regard to the Sustainability Framework, including its anchoring.

2. At the EMG SOM, a coalition of agencies may wish to commit to jointly supporting the discussion in other inter-agency mechanisms.
3. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, the Chair of EMG can inform UNEG and the JIU about the Framework, invite UNEG and JIU to engage in the consultative process and to take the Framework into account when carrying out their respective functions.
4. With regard to system-wide accountability, following the planned consultations with OLA, the Chair of EMG can inform the Ombudsman and Human Rights Rapporteurs about the Framework and invite them to take the Framework into account when carrying out their respective functions.

The options presented in this note, including Annex 1 can be summarized as follows:

#	OPTION	Suggested consideration by
Reporting to Member States		
1	Reporting on the Sustainability Framework could be a standard element of the SG's report which would then become the main or primary vehicle for reporting on the Framework to Member States and for receiving their guidance and feed-back.	All
2	The Sustainability Framework could be part of the HLPF reviews of UN system commitments.	All
3	Reporting on relevant elements of the Sustainability Framework could continue as part of reporting by the Executive Director of UNEP on UNEP system-wide coordination mandate on environmental sustainability.	All
Roles/ contributions of various inter-agency mechanisms and other internal bodies		
4	CEB could play a role in promoting high level UN system commitment for social and environmental sustainability in the work of UN system organization once the consultative process has been completed and the Framework has been finalized.	HLCF
5	At its 24 th session in April 2012, HLCF took note of the report of the Environment Management Group on the Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations system. HLCF could support the consultative process by providing a "system's perspective" on the Framework through electronic consultations. Committee members could share the broader agency view on the Framework as a means to gauge levels of institutional buy-in and identify areas that require more work and refinement.	HLCF
6	At its 25 th session in March 2013, HLCM considered the Strategic Plan for Environmental Sustainability Management in the UN system and committed to the development and implementation of environmental sustainability management systems in each organization, through a gradual, voluntary and flexible process. In this context, HLCM also requested UNEP to continue its work of coordination, technical support and reporting, and to periodically report back. HLCM could decide to also explore options for advancing social sustainability in internal operations.	HLCM
7	UNDG could decide that it will take the Sustainability Framework into account in the following contexts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When UNDG revises its Guidance on Joint Programming (whose safeguards 	UNDG

- will apply when and where?)
 - If UNDG revises the UNDAF guidelines (how to enhance the environmental and social sustainability of UNDAFs)
 - In the context of Delivering as One
 - With regard to the use of country systems, particularly impact assessments and supporting capacity building in that regard. This issue can be addressed more efficiently at the system-wide level than by individual agencies.
- 8 Provided that the SG’s report which was developed in consultation with ECESA+ becomes recurrent, ECESA+ could have a role in ensuring that the report becomes the vehicle for reporting on the Sustainability Framework to governments/ the HLPF. This role could be played in any case, e.g. whether ECESA+ would provide the hub or not. ECESA+
- 9 JIU could be invited to play a role with regard to system-wide accountability as well as monitoring the progress made. 19th EMG SOM
- 10 UNEG could be invited to play a role with regard to monitoring and evaluation of the progress made for individual agencies or the system as a whole. 19th EMG SOM

Potential hosts for the new hub

- 12 A hub under ECESA+ would benefit from proximity/ interaction with the thematic ECESA+ clusters which support the ECOSOC functional commissions. ECESA+
- 13 A hub hosted by EMG would be a default option. The uptake of the Framework beyond environmental circles would continue to be limited.

Ensuring coherence with broader sustainable development measures in the UN system

- 14 Finding a “new hub” for the Sustainability Framework could be linked with a decision on whether and where to develop the roadmap suggested by the SG to accelerate the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the UN system ECESA+

Annex 1: List of relevant inter-agency mechanisms and other internal bodies and their potential contribution to the Framework

Inter-agency mechanism	Mandate	Potential role/contribution to the SF- Relevance to the system wide needs	Possible “Hub” for the SF Process
CEB	CEB provides coordination and strategic direction for the system as a whole and is focused on inter-agency priorities and initiatives, while ensuring that the independent mandates of organizations are maintained.	CEB could play a role in promoting high level UN system commitment for social and environmental sustainability in the work of UN system organization once the consultative process has been completed and the Framework has been finalized. (OPTION 4)	No.
High-level committee on Program (CEB-system)	HLCP is the principal mechanism for fostering coherence, coordination and cooperation on programmes on strategic issues	At its 24 th session in April 2012, HLCP took note of the report of the Environment Management Group on the Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations system. HLCP could support the consultative process by providing a “system’s perspective” on the Framework through electronic consultations. Committee members could share the broader agency view on the Framework as a means to gauge levels of institutional buy-in and identify areas that require more work and refinement. (OPTION 5)	No
High Level Committee on Management (CEB-system)	HLCM identifies and analyzes administrative management reforms with the aim of improving efficiency and simplifying business practices.	The HLCM already contributes to the implementation of the internal operations/ management entry point of the Framework through the implementation of the Environment Management System HLCM could decide also to explore options for advancing social sustainability in internal operations. (OPTION 6)	No. HLCM’s focus is management, which is only one aspect of the Framework.
UNDG (CEB-system)	UNDG ensures a coherent support to countries seeking to attain internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium	UNDG could decide that it will take the Sustainability Framework into account in the following contexts: ❖ When UNDG revises its Guidance on Joint Programming (whose safeguards will apply when and	No. UNDG’s focus is the country level

	Development Goals.	<p>where?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ If UNDG revises the UNDAF guidelines (how to enhance the environmental and social sustainability of UNDAFs) ❖ In the context of Delivering as One ❖ With regard to the use of country systems, particularly impact assessments and supporting capacity building in that regard. This issue can be addressed more efficiently at the system-wide level than by individual agencies. <p>(OPTION 7)</p>	
The Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs ECESA/ECESA+	<p>With some 40 members ECESA+ is an expanded version of ECESA, established in 2010 to help the UN system prepare for Rio+20. Since Rio, ECESA+ has been involved in the drafting of the SG's report on mainstreaming of the 3 dimensions of SD in the UN system. ECESA+ is chaired by DESA who will also provide the secretariat for the HLPF.</p>	<p>Provided that the SG's report which was developed in consultation with ECESA+ becomes recurrent, ECESA+ could have a role in ensuring that the report becomes the vehicle for reporting on the Sustainability Framework to governments/ the HLPF. This role could be played in any case, e.g. whether ECESA+ would provide the hub or not.</p> <p>(OPTION 8)</p>	<p>Possibly. A hub under ECESA+ would benefit from proximity/ interaction with the thematic ECESA+ clusters which support the ECOSOC functional commissions. (OPTION 12)</p>
EMG	<p>EMG enhances UN-wide coordination related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlement and with its 47 members has been the "birth attendant and incubator" of the Sustainability Framework</p>	<p>EMG would under any circumstance continue addressing the environmental management of internal operations (through the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management, together with HLCM)</p> <p>With a new hub, any EMG role with regard to the environmental side of the Sustainability Framework would need to be clear, specific, time-bound and not duplicating or invoking parallel processes.</p>	<p>Default option for hosting the hub. The uptake of the Framework beyond environmental circles would continue to be limited. (OPTION 13)</p>

Joint inspection Unit	JIU assists in improving governance responsibilities of the UN system, improving efficiency and identifying best practices for information sharing	JIU could be invited to play a role with regard to system wide accountability as well as monitoring the progress made (OPTION 9)	N/A
UN Evaluation Group	UNEG is platform for UN Agencies to discuss emerging evaluation issues and enhance interaction among them to enhance knowledge sharing.	UNEG could be invited to play a role with regard to monitoring and evaluation of the progress made for individual agencies or system as a whole (OPTION 10)	N/A
UN Office of Legal Affairs	OLA provides a unified central legal service for the UN Secretariat.	Legal issues related to the Sustainability Framework, including accountability and grievance mechanisms.	N/A