

Concept note for Expert Group Meeting
Adapting UN system to better support sustainable development
UN Headquarters, New York, 3-4 December 2013
Rooms S-1522 and S-1523

Background

The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) forcefully called for the UN system to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout its work with the ultimate purpose of better supporting Member States to pursue inclusive and coherent policy approaches conducive to sustainable development.

The first report of the Secretary-General on “Mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system” issued last April confirmed previous analysis¹ that UN entities often take an issues based and/or ad hoc approach to mainstreaming and to enhancing sustainability. This reflects a varied understanding of the purpose and benefits of such undertakings as well as the specialized nature of the entities of the UN system. A process that ensures a more homogeneous integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system is central to Rio+20 follow up.

Purpose

The Division for Sustainable Development will convene UN system colleagues and a few other actors in a two-day meeting to:

- Take stock and build on the progress already made, including in the context of the SG’s report, the “Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System”, as well as in all inter-agency coordination mechanisms, including the CEB family (HLCP, HLCM and undg). ECESA Plus and other relevant inter-agency coordination mechanisms.
- Contribute to the discussion on how the UN system can become more “fit for purpose” to support the future sustainable development agenda in the post 2015 context.
- Discuss how the UN system as a whole can interact with/report to the High-Level Political Forum on progress in this regard.

Particular deliverables sought include:

- Better understanding of the conceptual and practical issues and gaps related to the increased integration of sustainable development as the overarching framework for UN system work.
- Next steps for the UN system to determine elements of a roadmap for moving forward.
- Discussion of options for UN system reporting on mainstreaming of SD to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).
- Decision on whether to hold a side event at the High Level Political Forum on these issues with Member States and Major Groups.

Programme

¹ A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System developed in the context of the Environmental Management Group in 2012.

The first day will set the stage by providing an overview of the current state of progress on mainstreaming sustainable development within the UN system and ongoing discussions about how to make the UN system 'fit for purpose' in the context of the current discussion on the post 2015 sustainable development agenda.

UN staff members and other experts will discuss their experiences in addressing sustainable development related concerns, through the sharing of lessons from the integration of sustainable development in organizations' strategic plans, and from integration of specific themes such as gender or human rights across the UN system.

The second day will focus on the mainstreaming of sustainable development at the operational levels, including programmes and projects. It will discuss the roles of UN inter-agency coordination mechanisms and of inspections and evaluations. The meeting will conclude with looking at practical ways to develop and implement system wide approaches and procedures that would expedite the mainstreaming of sustainable development as the overarching framework for all UN work, and by identifying options for UN system reporting on mainstreaming to the HLPF.

Participants (approx 40 people)

While the content and outcomes of this meeting will be relevant to all members of the UN family, the participation of specific members of ECESA Plus is particularly encouraged. Those members include UNDP, UNIDO, UNEP, WHO, FAO, WFP, IFAD, ILO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UNFPA, World Bank, IMF, Regional Commission(s). This list is determined among others by the results of an internal preliminary analysis of the strategic plans of these organizations.

The participation of secretariats of coordination mechanisms such as CEB/HLCP, CEB/UNDG, EMG, and the post-2015 set-up is also critical. The JIU and UNEG will participate to provide feedback and help inspire thinking about inspection and evaluation processes.

The programme will also benefit from the involvement of a few UN Resident Coordinators and one or two academics working on global sustainable development governance..

The meeting will be convened and chaired by the Division for Sustainable Development/UN-DESA and chaired/moderated by a mix of professional facilitators and UN system experts (details will follow).

Background documentation

Recommended reading includes:

1. Report of the Secretary-General on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/79&Lang=E)
2. A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System (<http://www.unemg.org/index.php/a-framework-for-advancing-environmental-and-social-sustainability-in-the-un-system>)
3. Options Paper on system-wide Issues in the Follow up of the Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN system
4. CEB/2013/HLCP-XXVI/CRP.9 (issue paper by the Vice-Chair)