UNITED

NATIONS

EP

United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme

**International environmental policy and governance
issues: relationship between the United Nations
Environment Programme and multilateral environmental
agreements**

United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment

Note by the Executive Director

The United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment, contained in the annex to the present document, was prepared by the United Nations Environment Management Group as a framework for achieving greater synergy, collaboration and coherence in the United Nations system's work to support Member States in the delivery of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Framework was endorsed by the Senior Officials of the Management Group on 30 March 2016 and presented by the Executive Director of UNEP, in his capacity as Chair of the Management Group, for the consideration of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination at its first regular session of 2016, on 27 April. The Board took note of the Framework as an important tool for enabling the United Nations system to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Board members were encouraged by the United Nations Secretary-General to support the implementation of the Framework in their respective organizations. The annex is presented as received by the secretariat, without formal editing.

∗ UNEP/EA.2/1.

Annex

United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment

U N I T E D   N A T I O N S   N A T I O N S   U N I E S

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

FOREWORD TO UN SYSTEM-WIDE FRAMEWORK
OF STRATEGIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a transformative action plan for people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership. The United Nations system has a central role to play in supporting Member States in implementing the Agenda and achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The *UN System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment* is designed to enhance the organization's ability to support Member States in addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development. It draws on the diverse expertise and resources of the UN system to integrate the environmental dimensions of the SDGs into the business model and organizational culture of the UN system as a whole.

I welcome the collective commitment of the Executive Heads of United Nations Agencies to work more coherently and collaboratively on the environment. I look forward to their continued cooperation to bring the 2030 Agenda to life.

Ban Ki-moon

United Nations Secretary General

COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

We, the Executive Heads of Agencies, Funds, Programmes, Departments and Multilateral Environmental Agreements of the United Nations (hereinafter referred to as UN organizations) hereby:

Welcome the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), that will guide global efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms and achieve sustainable development over the next 15 years.

Emphasize that the universal scope, inclusiveness and integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda—interconnecting the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development— offers an opportunity to drive the transformative change needed for people and planet to thrive.

Recognise that the environment and ecosystem goods and services underpin durable economic prosperity, health, and human wellbeing, including for women and men living in poverty.

Acknowledge the considerable wealth of experience in environmental management across the United Nations system at the national, sub-national, regional and global levels and that environmental activities have become an increasingly integral component of the work of the United Nations system as a whole, reflecting the growing recognition of the intrinsic links of environmental matters to a range of social and economic development issues.

Recognise that a number of United Nations system coordination mechanisms facilitate sectoral and/or operational collaboration on environment-related matters.

Reiterate that the environmental priorities identified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and other globally agreed environmental goals, require integrated, cross-sectoral solutions and aggregated action for successful implementation at all levels,

Support the implementation of this Framework of Strategies for the Environment in the United Nations system that facilitates greater synergies and convergence across these priorities, thereby contributing to the achievement of the SDGs as a common agenda with which to align existing and future strategies on the environment.

We hereby commit ourselves to contribute to the Framework and provide the relevant inputs of our respective organizations that it depends upon, adhering to the principles contained in this document.

We make this commitment to enable the United Nations System to work more coherently and collaboratively on the environment, to share experiences and facilitate the identification of good practices of the United Nations organizations, and to respond more effectively to and support Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This Framework supports the United Nations Secretary General's statement that "the United Nations system is strongly committed to supporting Member States in this great new endeavour". We agree that to rise to meet the challenges of the transformative sustainable development agenda, the United Nations system must continue to work to be "more than a sum of its parts", while also recognising that each part brings something unique and valuable.

CBD	ITC	UNESCO	UNISDR	ITU	UNFCCC	CITES	UPU
UNU	FAO	UNFPA	OHCHR	UNWTO	GEF	UN WOMEN	OCHA
UNDP	UNHCR	UNICEF	WHO	IAEA	RAMSAR	UNIDO	UN-HABITAT
WMO	ICAO	UNCTAD	UNOPS	IFAD	UN AIDS	WIPO	WORLD BANK
WTO	ILO	UNCCD	WFP	IMF	UNEP	IMO	UNITAR
BRS	UNSDR						

PART I

Background

In response to Resolution 1/11 of the first United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (UNEA) which "requests the Executive Director, mainly through the Environment Management Group and in line with paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want", to develop system-wide strategies on the environment…", the Environment Management Group (EMG) has prepared this System-Wide Framework of Strategies (SWFS) on the Environment. The SWFS aims to enhance the UN System's organizational and collective capacity to support Member States in implementing in an integrated manner the environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the growing capacity and expertise in environmental matters that UN organizations have developed over the past four decades.

Environmental activities have become an increasingly integral component of the work of the UN system as a whole, reflecting both the intrinsic links and contributions of the environmental agenda to a broad range of socio-economic issues, as well as the growing importance attributed to the environment by Member States through the governing bodies of the UN system. The associated environmental mandates of the UN organizations are diverse and range from setting international environmental norms and standards, providing policy and program support and capacity building to help Member States meet those norms and standards, to integrating environmental sustainability into the operations and activities of the UN organizations themselves.

The SWFS builds on the previous experience and lessons learned in enhancing system-wide coordination on the environment. The Framework recognizes that there have been successful cases of UN system-wide approaches at the global, regional and country levels, including common programming on the environment, in line with United Nations Development Group (UNDG) guidelines and Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) recommendations. However, for the most part, these ongoing attempts of UN system-wide approaches on the environment have not attained the critical mass needed to scale-up to UN system-wide application, or to catalyse transformative change in the way the UN system addresses environmental issues. Coordination and implementation of some strategies have also been challenging, in part due to the difficulty in transcending sectoral mandates, incompatible policy priorities, and a lack of a robust framework for collaboration.[1] Instead, more "issue based" and "ad-hoc approaches" to coordination have developed, focusing on system-wide approaches to emerging environmental issues, including through the EMG, but with less emphasis on the coherent delivery of such approaches.

This Framework aims to provide a flexible approach to achieving greater synergy, collaboration and coherence in the UN system's work on the environment, as an integral and critical dimension of sustainable development, culminating over time in the formulation of system-wide strategies on aspects of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda where such strategies will be necessary to frame the policies, programmes and activities of the entire UN system in each of these areas. It builds on the efforts already underway in each UN entity to bring its activities, policies and strategies into full consistency with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with its universal and shared vision of peace, prosperity, people, planet and partnerships and its policy requirements.

The UN system's ability to cut across these domains and pursue integrated objectives and outcomes will be a critical success factor in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Coalescing around a common set of goals, targets and means of implementation, and collaboratively formulating coherent and coordinated responses, can enable UN organizations to address the complexity of the new agenda and more effectively support Member States' efforts to achieve robust and sustainable results.

---

[1] For example, the UN System-wide Medium-Term Environment Programme (SWMTEP) in the UN system between 1985-1995, was challenged by its static and inflexible approach to synchronize with decisions of the governing bodies and budget processes of the participating organizations. In addition, the strong environmental thematic orientation of the SWMTEP led to apathetic participation by some UN organizations especially those with a socio-economic focus, perhaps due to the lack of clearly articulated linkages between the SWMTEP and the social and development agendas.

PART II

Goal

The scope and ambition of the universal and integrated 2030 Agenda and its SDGs[2] are unprecedented, as are the challenges the international community will need to address to realise a sustainable future for all. Only by mobilizing all United Nations entities to contribute to this endeavour, with each bringing to the table their respective strengths, capacities and resources, will the UN system be able to do justice to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and optimize its support to Member States' efforts to attain the ambitious sustainable development goals.

Ensuring environmental sustainability is a shared responsibility. Optimizing the UN system's contribution to this global/universal responsibility means drawing on its comparative advantages of diversity and specialization working collaboratively and delivering together. It is essential to foster and promote a culture of effective collaboration within and among UN organizations, at the strategic, programmatic and operational levels and to pool capacity and knowledge on the environment. In this way, the UN can provide support more effectively to Member States through the design and delivery of coherent, impactful, and cost-effective solutions that integrate the environmental dimension into their efforts to implement and achieve the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, efforts to extend and deepen collaboration on the environment across the UN system must recognize and build on the existing mandates and strategies that agencies have developed over the past decades. With each agency already engaged in strengthening the consistency of its environmental strategies and activities with the environmental components of the 2030 Agenda**, the SWFS draws on and seeks to facilitate the convergence of organizations' environmental strategies and work programmes toward the common objectives reflected in the SDGs and the associated targets specifically in their environmental components, leading to enhanced coherence in delivery by the UN system in the environmental sphere.**

The Framework is designed to respect fully the autonomy of each agency and the decisions of their governing bodies, to minimize any additional work or reporting, it will not seek to assess how well organizations' strategies are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, nor the extent to which the environmental components of the SDGs themselves are being implemented.

Objectives

The System-wide Framework has two mutually reinforcing objectives –(i) to foster and promote the convergence of individual agency strategies in the different areas of the environmental agenda, leading to more strategic approaches and, as necessary, the strengthening and elaboration of new system-wide strategies that will guide the environmental activities of the UN entities; and (ii) to enhance the collective effort, and in doing so, to strengthen the capacity of and synergies across the UN system to support the integration of environment dimension in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

Objective 1:

Enhance cooperation and collaboration across the UN system on environment in support of implementing the 2030 Agenda, by identifying the steps taken by individual UN organizations to deepen the consistency of their strategies and activities with the 2030 Agenda, in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as by facilitating a structured and timely exchange of relevant knowledge and information.

Objective 2:

Strengthen the UN systems' capacity and synergies to enhance integration of the environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda by, inter alia, drawing on the experiences of others, exchanging good policy and practice, leveraging the research and data systems of UN system entities, and identifying new opportunities for cooperation.

---

[2] General Assembly resolution 70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Anticipated Impacts

Collective and continuous efforts to share information about the respective capacity, programming and activities related to the environment of each UN organization can create greater transparency and access to information that could in turn catalyse synergies and complementarity among UN system entities.

As an immediate benefit, an overview of the UN system's work on the environment, organised according to the structure of the 2030 Agenda, can provide organizations and stakeholders with a practical starting point in terms of "who is doing what, where". This information can also contribute to reporting to the relevant intergovernmental processes by individual organizations. This compilation of information can also help to identify potential aspects of the environmental agenda for further collaboration by UN entities, and contribute to the identification of opportunities for directing greater attention and resources to close these gaps, reduce the fragmentation of effort in the UN system, and thereby strengthen the UN's effectiveness in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Such an increased understanding and awareness among all UN organizations of one another's work to support the 2030 Agenda could help improve internal prioritisation in each agency, strengthen partnerships, and increase efficiency and effectiveness of resources. This will also help to identify potential areas for new or deeper collaboration among UN entities and the existing UN system-wide inter-agency mechanisms such as UN-Water, UN-Energy, or UN-Oceans. Over time, such collaboration could assist the respective organizations – and the UN system as a whole– to deliver better value for the money invested in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The SWFS is therefore expected to support effective orientation of UN organizations' individual environmental strategies towards the SDGs by facilitating exchange of lessons learned among organizations on effective approaches to integrate the environmental dimension of SDGs, possibilities for joint approaches and reduced duplication. Individual organizations may continue to pursue environmental activities that are not explicitly captured in the SDGs, but the organizations' focus on the consistency with the SDGs will ensure that their activities become more and more relevant to the achievement of the environmental components of the SDGs. The consistency of the sustainable development agenda with the multilateral environmental agreements (MEA), and other previously agreed commitments of Member States in the environmental domain, ensures that the SWFS can also encompass the objectives of the MEAs, facilitating their achievement alongside, and as part of, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

PART III

Guiding Principles

To ensure that it adds value and serves as a relevant tool for facilitating stronger collaboration on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Development Agenda, and promoting as necessary the strengthening and elaboration of system-wide strategies on the environment, this Framework is guided by the following principles:

1. In efforts to integrate the environmental dimension, there is a need to build upon different organizations' strengths and expertise and take into account linkages among the environmental, social and economic dimensions of the sustainable development agenda by promoting cross-sectoral solutions and approaches that support the four pillars of the work of the United Nations – human rights, development, humanitarian and peace and security – and the multiple sustainable development benefits aspired to in the 2030 Agenda.

2. To achieve such integration and application of cross-sectoral solutions, a systems thinking approach needs to be applied on (i) analysing the drivers and leverage points for the integration of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda; and (ii) identifying solutions for collective action and support.

3. In advancing the normative environmental agenda, it is critical to remain cognizant of and respond to national priorities and development processes, respecting country sovereignty in determining policy priorities and aligning UN agency actions to these, as appropriate.

4. The environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda encompasses both the normative and operational work of the UN system on the environment, and the appropriate balance between these two aspects is central to successful implementation at all levels.

5. Opportunities for enhanced collaboration should be sought taking into account the organizations' existing and evolving mandates and strategic plans as well as existing interagency coordination platforms and respond to the evolving context of sustainable development in which the UN system works.

6. This Framework encourages strengthened collaboration among UN agencies and with stakeholders. It promotes greater efficiency and effectiveness of existing approaches for achieving greater collaboration in the UN system by enhancing the spirit of trust and credibility through mutual relationships and shared responsibility.

7. This Framework is designed to avoid duplication and competition among organizations, promote system-wide policy coherence and contribute to improved synergies between other inter-agency coordination mechanisms and the EMG – including the UNDG coordination mechanisms – at global, regional and national levels.

8. The transparent and timely sharing of organization information on individual and collective efforts, progress made, good practices and lessons learned through common knowledge platforms is key to ensuring a system-wide perspective and to the success of the Framework.

PART IV

Action Areas

The value-added of the SWFS is generated in three action areas – (i) UN organizations contributing relevant information to the EMG Secretariat in a timely manner (ii) the provision of an up-to-date system-wide perspective and analysis of this information and (iii) making the organizational information, analysis and a synthesis report available and accessible to UN organizations and stakeholders. These three action areas are described in more detail below.

a)   Contribution of organizational information

Within their respective mandates UN organizations will provide information and knowledge in support of the Framework for collaboration on an annual basis,[3] by means of a survey administered by the EMG Secretariat. Once they endorse the Framework, participating UN organizations will agree on the structure of this survey, which could include the following types of information:

Corporate / Organizational policies and initiatives

1. Corporate efforts or organizational change in each agency to become better fit for purpose to support the implementation of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, which could include, *inter alia,* changes in mandate, new or amended strategic plans, internal restructuring, new human resource management strategies, revised results frameworks, the introduction of safeguards, etc.

2. Information on participation in environmental and related SDG collaborative mechanisms and multi-agency and multi-stakeholder partnerships and

3. Submission of relevant corporate, program or operational policy papers, management directives, good practices and lessons learned in the above two areas for the benefit of other UN organizations.

Policy, Programmes and Partnerships

Organised according to the structure of the 2030 Agenda, at the goal level as a first entry point, organizations could submit information on:

1. Their relevant programmes and activities/plans, indicating the relevant time period;

2. The level of the activities (global/regional/national), potentially providing information on projects linked to specific countries; and

3. The nature of the activity (normative/operational/etc.)

---

[3] While the first submissions of information by organizations may be comprehensive, the future annual submissions will be in the form of updates to reduce the reporting burden. The annual reports will be a useful basis for identification of potential partnerships and joint programming opportunities

Organizational perspectives on potential gaps in implementation

The survey could also seek organizations' perspectives on emerging issues, potential gaps in coverage across the UN system, and opportunities for strengthening collaboration. The last may include suggestions for joint projects, programmes, activities, and –fundraising and more strategic approaches. Organizations may also propose scaling-up partnerships, or refer these opportunities to existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms and initiatives, or for decision by the EMG Senior Officials Meeting(s).

b) Processing and analysis of the information

The collation, presentation and analysis of the information contributed by UN organizations would contribute to creating a better understanding of what each organization is doing, where, and provide examples that other organizations could draw on for their own work.

Providing a system-wide perspective, the collation and presentation of the organizational information, including on prospective changes and amendments to strategies and mandates, could catalyse and deepen the internal reflection of how the respective organizations could optimize their system-wide engagement, and share data, expertise, knowledge products, methodologies and good practices.

The analysis and the synthesis report will provide a brief overview of the state of coherence, collaboration, and coordination on the environment within the UN system and will avoid assessing the success or the outcome of the participating organizations and the UN system's contribution to the environmental agenda.

The Framework envisages that the EMG Secretariat will aggregate and analyse the information contributed individually by the organizations, helping to identify opportunities for collaboration, linking and/or scaling up of initiatives and organization of relevant partnerships, including fundraising, as necessary. Such an analysis may also identify gaps in the UN system's support to the environmental dimension of the sustainable development agenda. The EMG could publish the findings of the analysis in the form of a synthesis report, compiled in consultation with EMG members and endorsed by the EMG Senior Officials.

Finally, the analysis will include a focus on the system-wide perspective, and give a predominantly qualitative view of the efforts by the UN system to enhance the effectiveness of its support to Member States in implementing the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, particularly with regard to progress in deepening and extending inter-agency collaboration on environmental issues. However, it may also trigger or create incentives for individual organizations to review, rethink, and/or affirm their programme and project portfolios.

The following outline offers an indicative structure of the synthesis report, mirroring the structure of the survey and information submitted:

➢ **Institutional** – The report could compile an overview of initiatives and examples of the organizational changes UN entities are undertaking to respond better to (the integration of the environment dimension of) the 2030 Agenda.

➢ **Policy /Programming** – The report could provide an overview and potentially a high-level mapping of who is doing what (where and at what level), and a description of the status of cooperation in the UN system on the environment.

➢ **Forward looking /response to gaps** – The synthesis report could dedicate a section to the identification of gaps in implementation, knowledge, strategic approaches or standards, and also suggest opportunities for strengthening existing cooperation or propose new initiatives in response to the identified gaps, which may include time-bound issue management groups (IMGs) under the auspices of the EMG. This section can also identify certain areas where agencies within a group complement one another's work in supporting successful attainment of the SDGs through enhanced collaboration in areas where none of them alone has the full mandate, resources or expertise necessary

The reports and supporting data are shared commodities, and UN system entities may, collectively or individually, wish to draw on them for further analyses and reporting, including for the SG's Reports on mainstreaming the three dimensions of sustainable development and possible UN system reports to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

c)   Distribution, utilisation and relevance

The synthesis report will be available as a public document. The EMG Secretariat could process and present the information submitted on the individual and collective efforts of UN organizations on a dedicated and searchable section of the EMG website, facilitating the sharing and exchange information, knowledge, and good practices, and providing easy access to background documents and links to other websites and portals. This report can also serve as guidance to a common UN system approach in utilizing the Regional Sustainable Development Forums for follow up and review of the 2030 agenda.

Individual UN organizations, the EMG through its Chair, and the EMG Secretariat, could undertake a series of activities that ensure that relevant discussions on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have access to or consider the findings of the analysis and synthesis report. These could include working through existing UN system coordination mechanisms, as well as the ongoing complementary efforts to improve the effectiveness of the EMG. It may also entail providing information and responses to the appropriate intergovernmental fora, with due cognisance of the appropriate channels and reporting obligations of individual organizations acting as the respective secretariats of intergovernmental bodies.

Finally, a periodic review of the Framework and its action areas will assess its relevance, value-added and effectiveness, in fostering collaboration on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, and suggest ways in which the Framework could be revised to enhance the effective achievement of its objectives.

The SWFS will be revised as appropriate based on information gathered through monitoring progress on the achieved results and lessons learned, as well as on emerging issues. In addition to annual reporting on the implementation of the SWFS to the EMG Senior Officials, the SWFS should be reviewed substantively every 4 or 5 years. The review could take into account the requirements and guidance from Member States or the Secretary General, as well as the requests from major forums such as the UNEA and the HLPF.

PART V

Roles and Responsibilities

Achieving the objectives of the Framework will require system-wide engagement in a collective process, where each actor plays an equally important part in its ultimate success. The role and contribution of the EMG in implementation and follow up of the Framework will be in line with maximizing its effectiveness to support the 2030 Agenda and its strengthened mandate in that regard.

Key actors and their envisaged roles, expected inputs and responsibilities in the application of the Framework include:

United Nations Organizations

United Nations organizations, including specialized agencies and secretariats of the MEAs, are invited to become signatories and appoint a Framework focal point within their organizations. The responsibilities of the focal points include coordinating data collection at the organizational level and submitting the data to the EMG Secretariat using the agreed template within the agreed timeframe on an annual basis. Organizational focal points will engage in a system-wide consultative process that will review and comment on the compilation document prepared by the EMG Secretariat based on the inputs received from the UN entities. Focal points will also be consulted on matters concerning the follow-up and review of the Framework itself. UN entities will also be individually responsible for considering what, if any, organizational actions to undertake within their own organizations, based on information and analysis provided through the Framework.

The EMG Senior Officials

The draft analysis and synthesis report will be subject to endorsement by the EMG Senior Officials at their annual meeting. The EMG Senior Officials will decide on actions to be taken concerning follow-up of findings of the analytical compilation document through the EMG as well as the revision and updating of the SWFS.

EMG Secretariat

The EMG Secretariat serves as the secretariat for the implementation and follow-up of the Framework. The secretariat will collect and receive the data submitted by UN entities and will compile and organize the data into a draft analytical compilation document that will be distributed to the UN entities for comments and delivered to the EMG Senior Officials for endorsement. The Secretariat will also update and maintain the website referred to above with the purpose to ensure access to information on and related to this Framework.