

Briefing by the Secretariat
The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to UNEP
15 February 2018,
9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
UNON Conference Room 4

Briefing on Sustainable United Nations and Greening the Blue

Introduction – UN Walking the Talk on Agenda 2030

The United Nations will not be credible in their efforts to fight Climate Change, Beat pollution or promote the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda if they do not internalize these principles at all levels.

The UN employs over 250,000 staff, distributed in hundreds of offices worldwide and in field missions. The potential we have to outreach to citizens, businesses and partners via not only our projects but our personal behavior as staff and our management practices is tremendous. Internalizing sustainability in facilities and operations also allows organizations to modernize and improve efficiencies, make their infrastructure more resilient by reducing dependency from natural resources and make UN staff proud of working in an organization that practices what it preaches.

The UN system does not start from zero on this: all UN organizations are working since 2008 towards the collective vision of a Climate Neutral and more Sustainable United Nations system. **The Sustainable United Nations (Sustainable UN) facility was created in 2008 with the strategic intent to support the UN system in walking the talk and integrate environmental sustainability considerations in the management of its own facilities and operations.**

The initiative is closely coordinated to the Environment Management Group (EMG) and serves UN Environment's core function of integration of environmental issues in the UN system in its implementation of internationally agreed goals, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, Sustainable UN supports the implementation within UN business operations of a number of SDGs such as SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities), and 12 (responsible production and consumption).

Sustainable UN has also direct responsibility for the greening of UN Environment and assists the UN Secretariat in New York and Field Missions, the latter through a common project (REACT - UN Peace Operations Rapid Environment and Climate Technical Assistance).

Current status – UN progress in internal sustainability management

Sustainable UN assists over 60 UN entities to measure and reduce their environmental impacts and offset unavoidable GHG emissions. The project has enabled accountability, coherence and synergies on environmental issues related to internal management in UN organizations in a very concrete manner.

With Sustainable UN technical support, UN entities have undertaken various actions to measure and reduce their climate footprint. The team has been able to assist organizations in getting away from ad hoc- fragmented initiatives and move to the implementation of more systematic approaches to emissions reduction and environmental management systems. Via a number of focussed interagency collaborations, tools and methodologies for measuring and reducing emissions are harmonized across the UN system and information is shared via regular meetings, interagency networks, and capacity building. The **Greening the Blue** campaign (www.greeningtheblue.org)

that is associated with the project features over 400 stories of concrete efforts made by UN organizations in creating opportunities for efficiencies, improve waste or water management or organizing more sustainable events.

FAO for instance has been able to save over 1 million USD in headquarters in Rome since 2008 by implementing an environment management system and focusing on energy efficiency, water and circular economy (procurement and waste management). UN Environment reduced its emissions of 60% since 2014 collaborating with UNON at building improvements (the new office facility) and via travel reductions. UNDP developed a Smart Facilities program focussed on energy efficiency with the aim to reduce dependency on fossil fuels while optimizing ICT services in many decentralized offices. The implemented projects generated 1,143 kWh green energy and close to \$1.8 million USD savings per year.

Data on the overall UN Footprint and examples of efforts made to reduce it are collected and published every year via the Greening the Blue report.

Opportunities and challenges / Way forward and conclusion

At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, Member States asked the UN system to internalize sustainable development considerations in UN business practices for facilities and operations. That clear request has guided and supported the work of the project all along.

Looking at the future, the SUN project team and the Environment Management Group members are keen to consolidate the progress achieved and expand it to a more holistic approach on corporate responsibility for facilities and operations that would be better aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Reform underway.

UN environment has gained now a particular insight into the physical assets of the UN system and how they perform with respect to energy, water, and waste management. While headquarter locations are underway to integrate routinely efficiency considerations in facilities and operations, the field (offices and operations) presents still great

opportunities for improvement. The Peer Reviews (or environmental audits) carried out by the EMG show opportunities in offices based in field locations of 30 to 50% in energy only.

Working more at country offices level, would also offer the opportunity to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and best practices from and to host governments showcasing resource efficiencies, financial savings and improved resilience.

A large part of the UN Reform is anchored in the idea of improving the credibility and effectiveness of the UN system in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Every player has a role to play and -for the values it carries and the responsibilities it has towards its beneficiaries- the UN cannot afford not to walk the talk.