



Briefing Note for the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the Environment Management Group in 2021-2022

Geneva, 16 June 2022

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I. Introduction

This briefing note is prepared as a background document to update the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives on the results of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) work in 2021 and to highlight its focus areas and expected outcomes in 2022.

II. Key Results in 2021-2022

1. UN System Contribution to the Biodiversity Agenda

Since Member States started the negotiations of a global biodiversity framework in August 2019, they have requested the EMG to contribute to the development of the framework. In that regard the EMG has established an interagency process on biodiversity to prepare the UN system's contribution and update them regularly on the progress made. In that regard the EMG prepared and launched the UN-wide report on biodiversity entitled "[Supporting the Global Biodiversity Agenda: a United Nations System Commitment for Action to assist Member States delivering on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.](#)" As a result and in order to implement the recommendations of the report, the [UN Common Approach to Biodiversity](#) was prepared and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) on 4 May 2021. The above publications were introduced to the wider public at a [High-level Dialogue](#) on 25 May 2021.

The EMG report highlight the relevance of biodiversity to the work of UN entities and how an increasingly coherent approach will yield multiple benefits across the SDGs. The report suggests four main areas of action for the UN to fully use and recognize its potential during the 2021-2030 decade to support the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. These include:

- Supporting country abilities to halt biodiversity loss and to sustainably use and enhance biodiversity through policies and programmes
- Establishing strong coalitions for biodiversity
- Mainstreaming biodiversity in UN internal operations
- Enhancing UN-wide coherence and follow-up on biodiversity

This inter-agency collaboration has led to a stronger system-wide understanding of the importance of addressing biodiversity loss. The UN Common Approach on Biodiversity, commits the UN system to mainstream biodiversity and catalyse collective action to address the drivers of biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and ultimately living in harmony with nature. It provides the normative framework, in a result-based structure, to organize collective action and joint delivery

to mainstream biodiversity and nature-based solutions. The Common Approach contains 15 medium term objectives, in partnership with governments, business and civil society. They set the overall strategic intent, and each contribute to at least one of the three impact areas: (i) human rights, peaceful societies and planetary stability; (ii) a green and inclusive economic recovery; and (iii) strengthened institutions, accountability and justice.

The EMG is now taking forward the key recommendations of the Common Approach and the report through three inter-agency Working Groups on awareness raising; the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration; and accountability and monitoring.

2. UN System Response to Marine litter and Microplastics

In response to UNEA resolution 4/6¹ and based on inputs from 45 UN entities, the EMG [Task Team on Marine Litter and Microplastics](#) prepared a report on “[Addressing Marine Litter and Microplastics – UN System contributions.](#)” The report maps existing UN agencies, programs, initiatives and expertise relating to marine litter; identifies synergies and opportunities for enhancing collaboration among UN entities; and facilitates coordination and joint programmatic initiatives and planning on marine litter and microplastics in the UN System. The report was launched through the high-level panel discussion [A UN System Response to Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution](#), held on 13 January 2022 in collaboration with the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues, GRID-Arendal and the Government of Norway. The executive summary has been translated into all UN languages. The Task Team will continue to serve as a resource expert group, providing input to, inter alia, the new Consultative Process on a Pollution-Free Planet (please see below).

3. A UN System Contribution on Sustainable Infrastructure

The Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure has provided inputs to a Second Edition of the International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure, to be launched in 2022. The updated ten principles - formally endorsed by the EMG – set out integrated approaches and systems-level interventions that governments can make to create an enabling environment for sustainable infrastructure. Complementary tools and case studies were exchanged among EMG members and are being integrated into the [Sustainable Infrastructure Tool Navigator](#) - an online platform to support Member States’ implementation of the International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure.

4. A UN system Contribution on Green Recovery

In line with the UN Secretary General’s A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, the EMG Report “[Inclusive Green Recovery: An Essential Post-COVID-19](#)

¹ UNEP/EA.4/Res.6: Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2019)

[Paradigm Shift to Build Back Better](#)” has been developed with inputs from 32 UN entities. The report is built around five priority areas: green energy, natural capital, building and energy efficiency, transportation, and R&D education and connectivity. A narrative on green recovery was prepared around five interrelated and interdependent building blocks: prosperity, health, nature, justice, and transformation.

5. UN Nexus Dialogues on the Implementation of the Environmental Aspects of SDGs

Through its Nexus Dialogue Series, the EMG continues to provide a forum for dialogue and exchange among the UN agencies and other stakeholders on the implementation of the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. These dialogues have identified emerging issues and challenges of implementation of the SDGs that need to be addressed by the EMG. They also have provided recommendations for more coherent and effective policies and actions in the UN system in the selected nexus areas including on:

- a) [Addressing COVID-19 for the Environment](#)
- b) [Food System Resilience through Integrated Natural Resource Management](#)
- c) [Sustainable Recovery through Sustainable Fashion: Focus on the Environmental Dimensions](#)
- d) [Investing in Natural Infrastructure](#)

6. Enhancing Sustainability Management in the UN System

The EMG facilitated the preparation of the [UN Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN system 2020-2030](#) which was prepared and endorsed by the CEB in November 2021. The Strategy describes how environmental and social sustainability considerations can be fully mainstreamed in the UN system and UN entities. It provides a comprehensive sustainability strategy for the UN system, encompassing a broader and fuller picture of environmental and social sustainability in policies, programming and support functions.

III. Focus Areas in 2022

1. A UN Consultative Process on Pollution-Free Planet

At their 27th meeting in October 2021, the EMG Senior Officials agreed to establish a Consultative Process on a Pollution-Free Planet with the objective to prepare a UN system-wide approach towards achieving the [Implementation Plan Towards a Pollution-Free Planet](#). The Consultative Process has started its work in 2022, focusing initially on addressing plastic pollution through a Core Working Group.

Core Working Group on Plastic Pollution

On 1st September 2021, the UN Senior Management Group (SMG) met to discuss ‘Multilateral Solutions to Marine Litter and Plastics Pollution’. The UN Secretary-General requested the Executive Director of UNEP to lead a working group to unite efforts across the UN system and with external stakeholders on solutions for challenges posed by plastic pollution. Following a proposal by UNEP to the first meeting of the EMG Consultative Process on a Pollution-Free Planet on 15 February 2022, a Core Working Group on Plastic Pollution was established within the EMG to respond to the Secretary-General’s call. The Core Working Group met on 16 March 2022 to agree on its Terms of Reference. Expected deliverables include joint messages for communication and advocacy to maximize the effectiveness of communication on plastic pollution; an overview of how the UN system and stakeholders provide sustainable solutions to the challenge of plastic pollution; a common offer to support an inclusive and just transition towards a plastic pollution-free planet; and a set of targets and indicators on internal performance of UN entities. The Core Working Group will build on the outcomes of other EMG processes including the work of the EMG Task Team Marine Litter and Microplastics as well as the former IMG on the Sound Management of Chemicals.

2. UN System Contributions to the Stockholm+50 International Meeting

The EMG Senior Officials agreed at their annual meeting in October 2021 to submit a contribution to Stockholm+50 that provides a UN system-wide perspective on delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a result the report [“Delivering on the vision of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”](#) as well as a [Summary for Policymakers](#) were prepared. The report summarizes reflections by Heads of Agencies and experts in the UN system on achievements and challenges encountered in addressing the environmental agenda since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, as well as aspirations and commitments towards accelerating mandates and actions to address the planetary crises. A complementary report [“The Impact of the Stockholm Conference on the UN System: Reflections of 50 Years of Environmental Action Interim Report”](#) was also prepared synthesizing the perspectives shared by the Heads of 33 programs, funds, specialized agencies and MEAs through interviews and written submissions.

The EMG high-level Roundtable *Accelerating Integrated Action for a Healthy Planet and Prosperity for All* was held in Stockholm on 2 June 2022. Two panels comprised of 16 UN agency and MEA heads and deputies discussed what the UN system can do to accelerate integrated action for the environment and how UN agencies can respond to and help implement MEAs on the ground. A summary of the Roundtable by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin can be found [here](#).

3. UN System Support on Human Rights and the Environment

In the wake of the historical [resolution by the Human Rights Council](#) recognizing the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the issue of human rights and the environment received a major boost in the EMG. The Group will focus on operationalizing this resolution within the UN system including through producing key messages for UN country teams on integrating the right to a healthy environment into their work; developing strategies for mainstreaming a human rights-based approach into the CBD and UNCCD (a strategy towards the UNFCCC having been prepared in 2021); and organizing three training webinars covering human rights and climate change, biodiversity/nature loss and pollution respectively.

4. The System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment

The EMG has been requested to provide inputs into the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) in terms of tracking implementation of the UN System Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment. Future editions of the SWFS report will contribute to the QCPR by providing system-wide snapshots of major developments within UN entities in the area of environment. The third edition of the SWFS report will be conceptualized through the Consultative Process in 2022.

5. UN System Contribution to the Implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework

In line with the UN Common Approach on Biodiversity In 2022, the EMG will focus on:

1. ***Awareness raising and knowledge sharing:*** *Enhancing* interagency dialogue and cooperation on the preparation and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework
2. ***Accountability & global-level reporting:*** Developing an accountability & global-level reporting framework within the UN system on the implementation of the Common Approach to Biodiversity
3. ***UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration:*** Facilitation and scaling up UN system-wide response to the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)

6. Sustainable Infrastructure

In 2022, the Consultative Process on Sustainable Infrastructure will focus on implementation issues:

1. Promoting and exploring implementation of the International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure among Member States and UN operations and facilities
2. Sustainable infrastructure barrier analysis led by UNU-FLORES – piloting of this approach on transportation, buildings, and energy sectors in Chile, with workshops and roadmap for policymakers to overcome barriers

7. [The UN Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN system 2020-2030](#)

The implementation of the Sustainability Strategy requires a governance structure that is commensurate with the ambitious vision and breadth of the two phases. In 2022, the EMG will analyse the governance models of existing inter-agency processes, in order to draw lessons for and propose a possible governance model for the *Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System, 2020-2030*.

The strategy and calls for a comprehensive monitoring of, and reporting on the UN system's environmental and social sustainability. A *Working Group for monitoring and reporting under the UN Sustainability Strategy (WG)* has been established to agree on the monitoring and reporting framework for the UN Sustainability Strategy, including a scorecard, outcome indicators, and reporting medium.

8. EMG Midterm Meeting

EMG members met on 18 May 2022, halfway through the operational year to consider progress made in interagency collaboration on the environment and discuss possible new issues on the EMG agenda in 2023. 45 UN entities agreed to present two new topics for UN system collaboration in 2023, for the consideration of the EMG Senior Officials at their next meeting in November: [Environmental data and statistics for the SDGs](#) and [Strengthening UN System-wide Support to RCOs/UNCTs for Triple Planetary Crisis Responses](#) .

