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Delivering on the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda

Update by the UN Environment Management Group

Introduction

United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 2/5 “*Delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” requested, *inter-alia*, the Executive Director of UN Environment to report to the Assembly at its next session on progress in implementation of the System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS) and the report on maximizing effectiveness of the Environment Management Group in the light of the 2030 Agenda.

This briefing presents progress made and steps forward by the Environment Management Group in response to this decision.

A) The United Nations System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS)

Current status

The SWFS is a collaborative framework to achieve greater synergy, collaboration and coherence in the UN system’s work on the environment to support Member States in the delivery of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. The Framework was prepared by the EMG, endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board for coordination (CEB) and launched at the second session of UNEA.

Following the UNEA Resolution 2/5, the EMG Senior Officials at their 22nd annual meeting, and considered the implementation of the Framework through a Consultative Process including preparation of an annual Synthesis Report on UN system contributions to the delivery of the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Synthesis Report will provide good examples of how UN entities are responding to the environmental dimensions individually and collectively, facilitate the sharing of information and good practices of existing inter-agency partnerships and collaboration and identify areas where there is room to improve, strengthen or launch new collaboration on the environment. Currently through a survey, UN agencies are providing inputs on issues agreed under the SWFS, which will be compiled and processed for the consideration of the Consultative Process. As a result, the first annual Synthesis Report will be submitted to the 23rd Senior Officials Meeting in September 2017 and consequently to the 3rd Session of UNEA in December 2017.

Opportunities and challenges

The SWFS provides a framework for following up on the environmental dimensions of the SDGs within the UN system. Overtime, the Framework can result in identification of common strategies on the environment and partnerships for effective use of resources and effective response. The Synthesis Report will document baseline results on which future reports under the SWFS can build, leaning as much as possible on what organisations are already doing in terms of reporting in relation to the 2030 Agenda. The Report will offer examples of internal strategies that individual agencies are using to align their environmental work with the SDGs; examples of how the United Nations and stakeholders are collaborating on the environmental areas of the SDGs; and areas where there are opportunities for scaling up and/or strengthening coordination in existing or new environmental areas of the SDGs.

In addition to the synthesis report, collaboration under the SWFS may result in sharing data and information by the participating agencies on their activities and initiatives at national, regional or global level in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Maintaining the SWFS process and requesting UN agencies to provide regular inputs is a challenge requiring regular contact and follow up. Working under the SWFS should not be limited to a Reporting Exercise adding another layer of reporting to the UN agencies. It should be a dynamic and useful process for UN agencies in which they benefit from collaboration by sharing data and resources, engaging in partnerships and gaining access to financial resources for implementing their respective environmental activities under the 2030 agenda.

Way forward

The implementation of the SWFS will form a significant part of the EMG work going forward. Focus will now be on collating and analyzing the inputs provided by agencies into a Zero Draft of the Synthesis Report for consideration of the Consultative Process by April 2017. An online portal hosting information gathered under the SWFS will be developed and linked to the EMG website.

B) Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Environment Management Group in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Current Status

Following Resolution 2/5, through an inter-agency Task Team a proposal is being considered by the EMG for implementation of the EMG Effectiveness Report including a revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure for the EMG in the light of the 2030 Agenda.

The Effectiveness Report recognized opportunities to further maximize the effectiveness of the EMG's mandate and points to a possible need to consider revising the ToR in order for the EMG to be fit for purpose. A revision of the ToR has been proposed with the view to ensure that it adequately reflects the EMG of today, the expectations from it in the context of the 2030 Agenda as well as the changes and developments of the EMG since its ToR was approved by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC, since replaced by the CEB) in 2000.

Opportunities and challenges

The discussion on maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG has provided a useful opportunity for the Group to renew itself and to reflect on and adjust to how it can best add value and support its Members and ultimately Member States in the implementation of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. The revised ToR will anchor the follow-up of the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda to the core of the EMG's role and contributions in the future. It clarifies the EMG's relationship with other inter-agency mechanisms, improves the modalities of its work and clarifies the role and contributions of its Members, providing them the opportunity to engage more actively in the work of the Group.

UN Environment remains as the lead agency in the EMG shouldering the most crucial responsibility to catalyse coordination and collaboration in the EMG. UN Environment should encourage more ownership and participation by UN agencies in delivering on the environmental dimensions of the SDGs and equally enhance the environmental agenda by integrating the socio-economic dimensions in collaborating more with the UN agencies with expertise in those fields with the support of the EMG.

Way Forward

A draft revised ToR and Rules of Procedures of the EMG will be considered by the Inter-agency Task Team in February with the view to finalize the draft for consideration of the Senior Officials in September 2017.

C) EMG Nexus Dialogues

Introduction:

Supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals will be the focus of the United Nations System in the next 15 years. Over decades, the UN system has developed a wealth of specialized technical, normative and operational capacity and services to support Member States on specific aspects of sustainable development. However, the 2030 Agenda with its integrated and indivisible nature challenges the UN system agencies to ensure that their specialized policy decision making and response systems are well suited to uptake and effectively support the integrated SDGs, including the environmental goals and targets. In the absence of innovative thinking and practice, the efforts and efficiency of the UN system in implementing the SDGs could be significantly lowered. It is crucial to identify ways to increase coherence, enhance synergies in governance and policy planning, put in place effective institutional architecture and decision-making processes, and scale up financing, and partnerships.

In this context, the Senior Officials of the EMG at their 22nd meeting in 2016 called for regular and more frequent meetings of EMG with focus on UN system cooperation and collaboration around some of the nexus issues embedded in the 2030 Agenda. In response, the EMG Secretariat in collaboration with the Stockholm Institute of Environment (SEI), plan to prepare and organize a series of EMG Policy Dialogues on environmental nexus issues linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. The EMG Dialogue series will contribute to a common understanding of the integrated goals and targets of the SDGs, as well as the requirements and opportunities these bring for

UN entities. The Dialogues will also provide an occasion for UN entities and other stakeholders to identify areas of mutual interest and collaboration in achieving the SDGs in a coherent and collaborative manner.

The nexus approach:

The nexus approach brings attention to intersections between domains and offers a way to address complex problems. The essential task when tackling complex issues is to break them down into feasible components and address the components one by one. The temptation – and often a useful strategy – is to break problems down along sectoral lines, however, when crucial decisions must be made at the nexus between sectors, with effects that spill over sectoral boundaries, this approach creates risks. The sector experts know their own area while very few are experts on the overlaps between fields. The nexus approach focuses attention on the overlaps between sectors, even as it respects the benefits of sectoral expertise. The purpose is practical: to make better plans through an understanding of interactions.

The proposed series of dialogues will offer techniques to think critically about nexus issues between any two or more domains, but given the mission of the EMG, particular focus will be placed on integrating the environmental dimension into plans to address the SDGs.

Current status:

A Concept Note is being finalized providing content, form and a plan for organizing a series of EMG Dialogues in 2017 on a set of nexus issues related the environmental dimensions of the SDGs.

Way Forward

It is anticipated to organize four nexus dialogues in 2017 in the margins of major inter-governmental meetings with relevance to the SDGs including the World Health Assembly, the High-Level Political Forum and the UN Environment Assembly. The Dialogues will convene representatives of UN agencies, Member States and other stakeholders and may consist of technical and policy level segments.

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