

Environmental Governance Programme: Partnership for Strengthened Internal Environmental Governance within the United Nations System – Annual Report 2022

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List of Abbreviations

BOS	Business Operations Strategy
CO	Country Office
DCO	Development Coordination Office
EGP	Environmental Governance Programme
EMG	Environment Management Group
EMS	Environmental Management Systems
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESS	Environmental and Social Standards
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GtB	Greening the Blue
IMG	Issue Management Group
SEPA	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SUN	Sustainable United Nations
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

1. Introduction

This report summarizes results and activities within the ‘Partnership for Strengthened Internal Environmental Governance within the United Nations (UN) System’ (hereafter ‘the project’), during 2022. The project is jointly implemented with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)’s Sustainable United Nations (SUN) facility and the UNEP hosted UN Environment Management Group (EMG) Secretariat, and part of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) Environmental Governance Programme (EGP). The project is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and supports the implementation of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 on Environmental Sustainability Management.

Programme activities are concentrated within three major working areas; Environmental Management Systems (EMS) including a component on virtual meeting culture; environmental sustainability within UN system programmes; and reporting on environmental performance. The project supports inter-agency coordination and advises UN entities on establishing environmental governance frameworks in UN system facilities and operations SEPA’s role is to identify and lead the implementation of project activities in collaboration with UNEP partners. For this purpose, a staff on loan from SEPA is placed with SUN in UNEP.

2. Progress and Achievements

2.1 Environmental Management Systems (EMS)

The work on EMS carried out within the project supports the target in UN Sustainability Strategy that all UN entities should implement an EMS by 2025.

The work in 2022 builds on the achievements in 2021, when the Greening the Blue (GtB) EMS criteria were updated and agreed, focusing on how to advance the work on implementation of EMS. The voluntary EMS working group, consisting of focal points from around 15 UN organizations, was initiated by the project in Phase 1. The EMS working group plays an important role for creating interagency cooperation, exchange and knowledge sharing between UN entities, eventually increasing the potential for a systematic and harmonizing approach on EMS in the respective organizations. The staff on loan has continued to chair EMS working group on various topics.

A key gap on EMS progress, identified in 2021, was the lack of UN entities performing internal audits on environmental management. Therefore, the project strategically targeted to strengthen capacity on internal audits in 2022 and prepared for the implementation of training to be carried out in 2023.

Key activities during 2022 were:

- A guidance, checklist and an audit report template were drafted and shared with EMS focal points. This material can be used for internal audit support.
- Confirmed focal points interest in participating in internal audit training on EMS. Terms of Reference for training instructor were finalized.
- Strengthened capacity in the EMS working group on internal audit by dedicating two sessions on the topic.

Other work on EMS included:

- Continued bilateral support to UN entities by responding to requests for support in their implementation of EMS (e.g. UNEP, UN Secretariat, WIPO, ESCAP).
- Developed the risks and opportunities section of the EMS toolkit guidance.
- Carried out an initial review of UN entities' environmental policies and targets so that the SUN team got a better understanding of good practices and differences between UN entities which can be used to develop support.

2.2. Virtual Meetings

GHG emissions from air travel make up more than 40 percent (2019 and earlier) of the total GHG emissions reported by the UN system, it is therefore important to reduce the need for and emissions from air travel. The project has continued to improve the systematic approach to sustainable virtual- and hybrid meetings culture and practices. This project component is carried out together with experts on virtual- and hybrid meetings from the Swedish Transport Administration.

The summary report and analysis of sustainable virtual- and hybrid meetings culture, based on a pilot study of UNESCO, was drafted in 2022 and will be finalized 2023. Key findings and guidance material will be presented to the Issue Management Group (IMG) of Environmental sustainability management for further use by UN entities. This is expected to improve the capacity of UN entities on virtual- and hybrid meetings and events. An online open-source tool on green events, greeneventstool.com that includes a methodology to calculate emissions from in-person meetings was launched by SUN at UNEP and UNFCCC in 2022. The staff on loan is during 2022/2023 collaborating with the partners to further develop the tool to accommodate also virtual and hybrid meetings.

Key activities during 2022 were:

- A webinar on good practices of large hybrid and virtual meetings in the UN System held in March 2022.
- A presentation on measures to reduce travel and guidance on virtual- and hybrid meetings at the IMG 39 of Environmental sustainability management in June 2023. This raised awareness of the possibilities of virtual- and hybrid meetings among environmental sustainability focal points.
- A closure meeting with UNESCO was held in November 2022, including a site visit to see the UNESCO meeting facilities and to discuss the recommendations to UNESCO in the final report for the pilot.

2.3 Mainstreaming of environmental sustainability in programmes and projects

Based on the analysis of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 indicators and targets, reporting on Environmental and Social Standards (ESS) in the UN system was included in the Greening the Blue (GtB) survey on environmental governance for the first time in 2021. In 2022, the project continued to follow up on this aspect to support the strategy's target of 100 % of entities have an entity specific ESS by 2030, which also includes a commitment to integrate environmental and social safeguards in project activities. According to GtB data from 2021, 22 UN entities have standards in place, 9 entities are in the process of putting standards in place, 11 entities reported that they do not have such standards (10 entities did not respond to the survey question).

In their work with developing or improving their Environmental and Social Standards (ESS), UN agencies may voluntarily use the Model Approach for UN Programming, a benchmark guideline published in 2019 by the EMG Consultative Process on Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System. Since 2021, the project works closely with the EMG and the Model Approach working group to develop activities supporting the ESS. In 2022, the project carried out in-depth interviews with four entities. The purpose of the interviews was to:

- Explore the need for support among entities intending to develop ESS, update ESS or have indicated that they lack an ESS
- Expand the community of practice for the Model Approach on ESS and introduce knowledge resources and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning
- Capacity building /share information on the concept and content of the Model Approach on ESS
- Collect information to develop a proposal for response on the support needs

The interviews revealed that the approach to ESS vary among entities. Some have a stand-alone framework whereas others have integrated it into other frameworks, programme management manuals and similar. Support and training are still in demand. Due to staff shortage at the EMG secretariat during the latter part of 2022, the dialogue with EMG on a potential next step has been postponed to 2023.

2.4 Environmental reporting

A focus area of the project, where the staff on loan plays a key role, is the annual update and release of the UN system-wide internal environmental sustainability report, the Greening the Blue report. In collaboration with the SUN team, the design of the annual survey on environmental governance and management functions was further elaborated.

Additional indicators from the UN Sustainability Strategy on Environmental Sustainability Management 2020-2030 were integrated in the survey. Also, two

questions for the reporting to the UN General Assembly from the QCPR reporting framework and its indicators were added.

As part of the work to improve the GtB report, a senior adviser from SEPA reviewed the process of the GtB waste inventory and suggested areas of improvement to the SUN team. The SUN team increased knowledge on the waste inventory process and initiated an update of the Greening the Blue waste guidance. As a result, the UN system can improve progress and target relevant actions to improve monitoring and data collection and ultimately improve the internal environmental sustainability performance.

2.5 Advocacy and Communication

Sweden is one of the largest donors to the UN system and it is therefore relevant that Swedish stakeholders are updated on the UN entities internal work on environmental sustainability.

During 2022, the Swedish EPA has presented the project and its results to Swedish agencies working with the UN. This included Sida, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, permanent representatives to UN agencies at Swedish Embassies in Nairobi, Geneva, New York and Paris and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. The purpose of these dialogues is to exchange knowledge and promote synergies among Swedish actors working on environmental cooperation within the UN system, thus increasing the leverage effect of the project's lessons learned.

3. Risks

During 2020-2021 implementation was strongly influenced by the Covid 19-pandemic, which led to changes in working routines but also continued risk management in view of staff shortages and delayed activities. However, since the second quarter of 2022, the organizational response to the Covid-19 pandemic has changed and the need for risk management in relation to the pandemic has decreased. At the same time, UN entities partly returned to in-person meetings and working in the office, where appropriate. An increase in travel also emerged after many countries lifted their travel restrictions. Whereas the capacity for arranging virtual meetings has increased, there is still a risk that virtual meeting fatigue may lead to unnecessary increases in travel. This risk is being addressed as part of the ongoing work on a sustainable meeting culture.

At outcome level, the main challenge is institutionalizing the implementation of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 on Environmental Sustainability Management. Two key areas are identified as risks to achieving this: the lack of for the purpose dedicated, permanent staff resources in the UN system with environmental sustainability expertise and the lack of UN system senior management commitment and accountability. The project cooperation partners EMG secretariat and SUN team are also vulnerable to staff turnover, causing a delay in some activities.

Ultimately, there is a need for member states to advocate for a higher priority for internal sustainability, as part of their dialogue with the UN system, which is why the project added a component of advocacy towards Swedish actors with responsibility for UN support.

Like many organizations, the UN entities still partly tend to work in silos, which is a risk factor for achieving system wide goals, such as the targets of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030. The project has identified inter-agency collaboration on implementation of system-wide processes and policy documents as key to achieve peer-to-peer support as well as peer pressure. This in turn creates demand at entity level for capacity building and resource allocation. The project therefore focusses on strengthening inter-agency cooperation as a core instrument for achieving project goals.

4. Conclusions and Way Forward

The progress of the ‘Partnership for Strengthened Internal Environmental Governance within the United Nations System’ within EMS and environmental reporting was at large according to plan. There is continued relevance to support inter-agency coordination mechanisms in the continued implementation of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 targets on EMS, ESS and environmental reporting, which remains the focus of the project workplan in 2023.

Overall, since the adoption of the second phase of the UN Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030 in 2021, the UN system has adequate frameworks in place. However, there is still a need for senior management to prioritize and allocate resources to implementation of the strategies and goals. Accountability frameworks to monitor the progress are not always in place, and the situation varies between entities. A recommendation for Swedish actors representing Sweden as a member state, is to include internal sustainability as a question for dialogue with UN system, on the overall level and with the respective agencies as part of core support. Therefore, the project will continue to promote information exchange with this network in 2023.

During 2022, the UN system gradually returned to in-person meetings and a higher degree of travel. Since one of the most significant sources of GHG emissions in the UN system, air travel, dropped during pandemic, it is relevant to act now to keep emissions down. There is also high interest to this topic among UN entities. The work plan for 2023 therefore includes the chairing of an interagency task team on reducing emissions from air travel. Guidance and recommendations to UN entities on policy, targets and measures will be updated to support long term emission reductions from the UN system.

During 2022, the project took a decision to reduce and revise the component of ESS. UN partners (EMG, DCO and UNDP) still request support to the development of country level implementation of environmental and social standards in programmes. However, these partners do not have funding set aside for country level work. Since one of the main success factors in achieving the

goals of this project so far has been working in partnership and alignment with existing units and working groups of the UN-system, the assessment is that setting up a project component promoting country-level work on ESS falls outside the scope of the partnership between Swedish EPA, SUN and EMG. A recommendation to Sida is to explore how the lessons learned by piloting of ESS in the Sida-funded Programme on Environment and Climate Change with UNDP could be further spread to a wider audience in an inter-agency setting, since the scope of that activity to a large extent corresponds with the ideas for piloting discussed with the UN entities in the Model Approach working group. In the continued work in the project, the area of work will be narrowed down to supporting EMG with the implementation of “deep dives” (webinars) on different areas of the ESS framework.

Additional areas in need of support by the project, were identified. There is not sufficient capacity to start work within these areas during 2023, however they may be included in a potential prolongation. Within EMS, one key area would be to better support Country Offices (COs) and UN Common premises via the integration of the sustainability strategy in the UN Business Operations Strategy (BOS) 2.0. For UN common premises, a key area is to develop and set a scope for EMS to avoid overlap by each UN entity scoping its own EMS for common premises and to avoid gaps where not all COs are included in entity level EMS scope.