



Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN System 2020-2030

Phase I: Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management

Table of Contents

I.	Context.....	2
II.	A Demand for Unprecedented Action on Climate Change.....	2
III.	A Vision for Sustainability Management in the UN System 2020-2030.....	3
IV.	Proposed Approach towards the Vision.....	3
V.	Existing Efforts and Results to date.....	4
VI.	Gaps Analysis.....	7
VII.	Environmental Sustainability in the Area of Management.....	9
	1. ENVIRONMENT AS A CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE.....	9
	2. BUILDING ON EXISTING EFFORTS.....	10
	3. COMMITMENT TO A COMMON BUT FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE, SUPPORTED BY A STRONG INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION MECHANISM.....	10
	4. COMMON GOALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND ASPECTS.....	13
	5. MOBILISING ALL RELEVANT MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS.....	20
VIII.	Enabling Conditions.....	23
IX.	Recommendations.....	24

Annex I: COMMITMENTS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AREA OF MANAGEMENT

I. Context

In December 2018, the UN Secretary-General asked the UN to raise the level of its internal ambitions and to intensify its efforts to combat climate change from within. Specifically, the Secretary-General wishes to highlight at the September 2019 UN Climate Summit that the UN is “walking the talk” on environmental sustainability and climate change.

This request raises the profile of an existing mandate from Senior Officials of the UN Environment Management Group (EMG), in September 2018, to develop a UN internal sustainability vision and strategy beyond 2020 to confirm the UN’s leadership aspirations in the area of internal environmental and social sustainability and to show that the UN aligns its own performance with the principles it has pioneered internationally¹.

Both requests echo calls by member states, in General Assembly resolutions and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, for the UN to lead by example. They are also consistent with the requirements of international financial institutions and multilateral funding mechanisms for the implementation of environmental and social safeguards in UN projects and programmes.

The EMG and the UN Environment Programme have been given the task of responding to these requests and propose herewith a *Strategy for Sustainability Management in the UN System 2020-2030* with an overarching vision for sustainability management and a two-phased approach for achieving it.

UN entities already have much progress to show, thanks to ten years of collective work to measure, reduce and offset their impacts on the environment. There remain important gaps, however, and ample scope to chart new levels of ambition towards 2030, building on efforts to date.

Sustainability management helps the UN address and manage risks to the natural environments in which we operate, to the health of UN staff, to the livelihoods of the people we serve and ultimately to the UN’s credibility and reputation. At the same time, it brings about opportunities to generate benefits such as efficiencies in the use of natural resources and financial efficiencies, accountability and transparency in how the UN manages the delivery of its mandates. The pressing need to address environmental challenges such as pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services means there is an urgency to the UN system raising its sights and making a dedicated and long-term commitment to ensure that its own activities do not cause further harm.

¹ EMG SOM24

GHG Emissions

Climate Change is leading to irreversible changes in major ecosystems and the planetary climate system. The IPCC and the UN system are calling the world to take concrete action to limit global temperature increases to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. As any other actor in society, the United Nations needs to align its own practices with these goals if it wants to be a credible advocate for climate action.

The 2018 edition of the UN Greening the Blue report released GHG emissions data from 66 UN entities and over 250,000 personnel. The United Nations system emitted 1.86 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂eq) in 2017 – or 7.26 tCO₂eq per capita. 44% of UN entities' greenhouse gas emissions came from facilities (headquarter offices, field offices, warehouses, etc.), 42% from air travel, and 14% from other modes of travel such as ground transport.

Several UN entities have already taken concrete steps to reduce their GHG emissions in facilities by optimizing resource use through investing in more efficient appliances and fixtures, purchasing renewable energy, or using on-site renewable energy sources. Nevertheless, EMG Peer Reviews of environmental management in UN entities, carried out in 17 locations since 2014 both in headquarters and in the field, have identified opportunities for up to 50% energy efficiencies in some buildings. More systematic measures and efforts are needed to further improve the use of energy in UN facilities and operations.

Transport (both air travel and ground transport) is another area with significant scope for improvements. Only a handful of entities have integrated environmental considerations into their travel policies and opportunities offered by remote meeting technologies are not yet fully exploited. Initiatives to bring efficiencies in UN fleet management, especially in the field, have shown that savings of 25 to 30% in fuel consumption can be achieved and should be upscaled.

While continuing efforts to reduce emissions, unavoidable emissions need to be offset to meet the UN Systems' climate neutral commitment.

Objective	Aspects	Commitment	2020-2030 Indicators
Reduce absolute GHG emissions by 2030 to limit increase in global	Use of Electricity	Optimize electricity consumption in facilities	% reductions in electricity use

temperature to 1.5 °C, in line with recommendations of the 2018 IPCC report. (baseline year and specific targets to be agreed)	Energy sources	Switch to renewable energy sources	% of renewables
	Air Travel	Reduce and optimize commercial air travel for operations and programmes	% GHG emissions reduction from air travel
	Ground travel	Minimize/optimize fuel consumption for ground travel of UN staff for operations and programmes	% reduction in fuel use from ground transport
	Climate Neutrality	All UN entities maintain their climate neutral status	% of UN system-reported unavoidable GHG emissions that are offset

Waste

Poor waste management potentially exposes waste handlers and the community at large to health problems and risks polluting the environment by contaminating water bodies, soil and air. Dumpsites are one of the main global emitters of GHG emissions, especially methane. The importance of diverting organic waste from dumpsites and uncontrolled burning to safe and environmentally sound disposal cannot be overstated.

Waste generation and management is an important measure of the impact the UN system has on the communities where it works. UN waste management practices have been tracked and reported to the public since 2015. This work has highlighted waste as a serious area of risk for the UN. In the 2018 inventory, the UN-wide rate of reuse, recycling, composting and recovery was a low 23%. Nearly 50% of reported UN waste is managed by third-party organizations, hired to dispose of unwanted materials, but without much in the way of downstream guarantees of safe disposal, recycling or specialized handling for hazardous substances. There is currently no systematic solution for e-waste, and often offices stock it for lack of better local options.

The focus of the 2018 World Environment Day on plastic pollution resulted in a number of initiatives in UN entity headquarters to limit the use of single-use plastic, but more can be done to measure, assess and reduce the use of plastics in UN facilities and operations, especially in field locations. Measures to improve waste management need to start from better measurement (as part of the waste management contracts), prevention, and control of waste streams from UN facilities and operations.

Objective	Aspects	Commitment	2020-2030 Indicators
Ensure no solid waste from UN facilities, operations and activities is causing pollution or other harm to the environment and local populations, by avoiding the release of toxic substances to the air, soil and water bodies and adverse impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems.	Non-hazardous waste	Minimize non-hazardous solid waste generation derived from UN facilities, operations and activities while ensuring proper recycling, treating and disposal.	% entities with formal waste management programs % of waste diverted to reuse/recycling
	Hazardous waste	Minimize hazardous solid waste generation derived from UN facilities, operations and activities, while ensuring proper recycling, treating and disposal	% of hazardous waste formally processed using environmentally sound management standards
	Single-use plastic	Reduce single-use plastics across UN compounds and activities	% reduction of single-use plastics in entity headquarters /in field /humanitarian operations % reduction of plastics from UN activities or compounds dispersed in the environment % of UN entities with single-use plastic policies

Air pollution

Air pollution causes approximately 7 million premature deaths worldwide every year. 91% of the world’s population lives in places where air quality exceeds WHO standards limits ([WHO, 2019](#)). It is important for the UN system to understand and monitor its own impact on air pollution and to take steps towards improving the air quality in the places it works.

There is currently no measurement of air pollution caused by UN facilities and operations, although the annual system-wide environmental inventory provides data on fuel usage, ozone depleting substances and short-lived pollutants via the monitoring of GHG emissions. In addition, the majority if UN facilities utilize fluorescent tubes lamps which are more often than not disposed through breakage, releasing mercury vapor they contain into the atmosphere.

Improving the efficacy, upgrading and reducing often oversized fleets and generators, using energy efficient equipment and eventually moving to on-site renewables would reduce GHG emissions and air pollution generated by UN facilities and operations and would also bring considerable cost savings. Fleet management initiatives, some of them inter-agency, are showing improvements in fuel efficiencies of 25% to 30% and can be further developed and upscaled.

Stratospheric ozone depleting substances and high global warming potential alternatives are being progressively phased out worldwide and UN offices (many of which are still using these in refrigerants or in air conditioning), should lead as examples.

Objective	Aspects	Commitment	2020-2030 Indicators
Ensure UN premises and fleet do not contribute to or exacerbate local air quality issues, in both urban and remote community settings	Fossil fuels	Minimise to the extent possible the particulate, black carbon SOx, NOx, and other (non-GHG) emissions from burning fossil fuels in generators and vehicles for heating or cooking or from supplied electricity	% of electric vehicles % fuel in use that meets international quality standards
	Refrigeration and air conditioning Hydrofluorocarbons	Ensure UN premises do not contribute to depletion of the Ozone layer	% of UN entities that have phased out ozone-depleting substances
		Minimize the release of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) by purchasing exclusively low global warming potential and energy efficient refrigeration equipment and air conditioning systems	% entities with a plan for phase down of HFCs % of UN premises/facilities using low GWP equipment for refrigeration and air conditioning