# SES Learning and Communication Strategy

1.   Introduction

UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards (SES) first came into effect 1 January 2015. While an update to the policies was approved in late 2019, it came with a clear mandate to prepare an implementation strategy to ensure strengthened institutional arrangements and capacities for implementation. An inter-bureau SES Task Force was subsequently established to lead the development of the implementation plan, building on lessons learned from the last five years. Among the key lessons and feedback received was the need for greater and sustained investment in learning and training opportunities on the SES. Therefore, the SES Task Force has developed a Learning and Communication Strategy which is at the heart of the implementation plan.
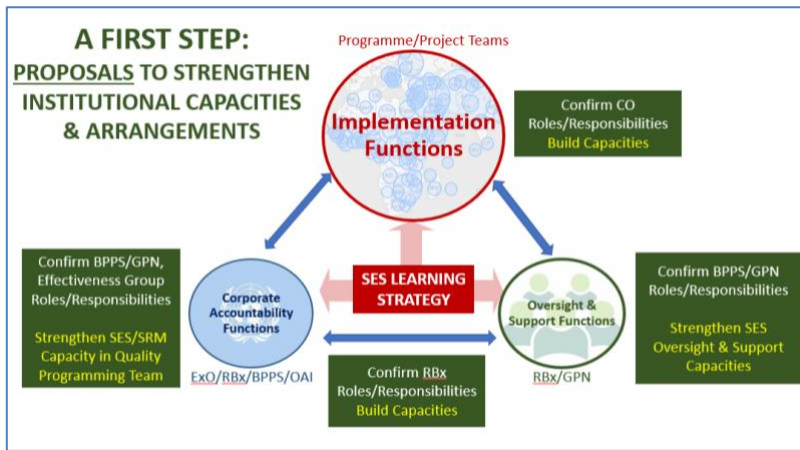
Lessons from the last five years have showed that one-off ad hoc trainings with very limited investment in continued and progressive learning opportunities is insufficient at best. It has also shown that one-way communications and trainings reliant on a small HQ SES team are not an effective strategy to build the capacities and awareness needed, as evidenced by continued low levels of basic awareness and understanding of the SES.

To respond to these lessons, this Learning and Communication Strategy describes the objectives, principles, approach, and resources required to ensure scaled-up and sustained investment in SES learning and communications. With a corporate commitment to invest in continued learning and implementation capacities, UNDP aims to enter a new phase of embedding the SES in the way we manage and implement our programming.

This strategy is closely linked to **UNDP's People Development Strategy 2030** and aligns with its' objective to progressively transform UNDP's culture and capacity to deliver more and better results. It directly supports the focus on a "learning culture and streamlining learning" across UNDP, integrating learning into the day-to-day business of the organization and developing a true learning organization that is able to facilitate learning and innovation of its members, and continually transform itself.

2.   Objectives

Enable UNDP staff to progressively understand and implement UNDP's SES as an integral and fully embedded component of effective programme and project management, applying a principled and risk-informed approach. Raise awareness among all relevant stakeholders of the value and purpose of the SES, create and/or strengthen capacities of implementing partners.

3.   Principles

Responding to lessons learned and to achieve the objectives this Strategy is underpinned the following principles:

- **Targeted Learning**: Based on clarified roles and responsibilities (defined in Annex 2 of Implementation Plan), the strategy aims to provide targeted communications and learning opportunities that are relevant and timely for different audiences.

- **Practical Learning**: Learning will be focused on implementation rather than compliance, providing practical and applied skills. It will go beyond the policies and strengthen risk identification, data collection and informed decision-making. Further, training will be adapted to respond to specific challenges in the regional and/or country context and emphasize risk mitigation efforts throughout the project cycle.

- **Continuous/Progressive Learning**: Opportunities will focus on enabling a "learning journey" for staff to build a foundation and continue to grow and deepen their capacity, rather than infrequent and one-off trainings.

- **Experiential Learning**: Focus will be on learning by doing and learning through real-life lessons learned and experiences, sharing models of success as well as learnings from failures.

- **Shared Learning**: The strategy aims to facilitate more peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.

- **Accessible Learning**: Bite-size learning available for users when they need it and in multiple languages, to tailor their own learning journey.

4.   Approach

Based on the above principles, the approach for the Learning and Communications Strategy is focused on **reaching those responsible for implementation as a priority**. To enable this, the approach recognizes that the accountability, oversight and technical support mechanisms also need to be identified, streamlined, funded and capacitated to be able to scale up learning and communications. Therefore, this strategy identifies key target groups based on their roles and responsibilities at all levels to build a critical mass of SES expertise and shift away from reliance on a very small HQ SES team to deliver the necessary trainings and learning resources. The approach also ensures capacity building is embedded in broader efforts around programme, project and overall risk management.

Practitioners	•**WHO**: Programme Officers, Project Teams, M&E Officers •**WHAT**: Practical and operational skills and capacities, direct value and applicability to their work, tools for quality assurance
Partners	•**WHO:** Implementing Partners, Responsible Parties, Consultants/Contractors •**WHAT:** Knowledge and practical application of SES, Relevance to their work
Programme Managers/CO Senior Management	•**WHO**: RRs/DRRs •**WHAT**: Awareness and leadership, management, decision-making and communications skills, risk management and handling grievances
Specialized Oversight & Support	•**WHO**: GPN experts, internal and external experts, Regional SES LTAs, NCE SES personnel •**WHAT**: In-depth technical knowledge, may be targeted to specialized area (e.g. Indigenous Peoples), practical guidance.
RBx Oversight & Support	•**WHO**: RBx SES Focal Points, Country Office Support Teams, PPM Focal Points, Risk Focal Points •**WHAT**: Understanding of SES requirements, ability to communicate to COs and partners
Corporate Accountability, Senior Management	•**WHO**: RBx and CBx Directors and Deputies, ExO focal points •**WHAT**: Awareness and leadership, management, decision-making and communications skills, risk management, SES Management on the Portfolio Level

As a large decentralized organization and with SES roles and responsibilities sitting at all levels, this strategy aims to **maximize and scale up the reach** of capacity building and learning through a few key mechanisms, including:

Building a Cadre of CO Leaders/Champions

The most effective communications on the learning and importance of the SES come from those who are leading implementation on the ground. Many Country Offices and individuals within COs are playing a leadership role in advocating for and implementing the SES. The Learning and Communications Strategy aims to identify a cadre of leaders and advocates and provide them with the platform to share their experiences more widely with other COs.

Building a Cadre of SES Experts in Regional Hubs

UNDP is lucky to have internal expertise from human rights to environment needed to implement the SES. However, these experts have not been trained or mobilized to offer this support. This strategy aims to build a "critical mass" of in-house specialized SES expertise within the GPN to offer support and trainings to the practitioners at the forefront of implementation. An initial phase will involve in-depth training for a group of experts within the GPN, primarily based in the Regional Hubs, on the content and implementation of the SES, simultaneously equipping them to deliver training and build internal and external capacity. Continued learning opportunities will be provided to these experts as well as networked knowledge sharing and exchange.

Capitalizing on ThroughLine and SparkBlue

ThroughLine (in development) is being designed to become the daily management tool for users, connecting data and information from across dozens of UNDP's existing systems in addition to incorporating additional data/tools needed to deliver better results. It is a customizable collaborative workspace tailored for the particular user's needs. While the initial prototype helps users manage ongoing projects, additional profiles will focus on different functions such as the programme/CO, policy advisor, RBx oversight, etc. In addition, external roles for government partners, donors and other partners will be incorporated. Therefore, *Throughline* will provide a key mechanism for delivering relevant SES guidance and knowledge material tailored to the individual user's needs.
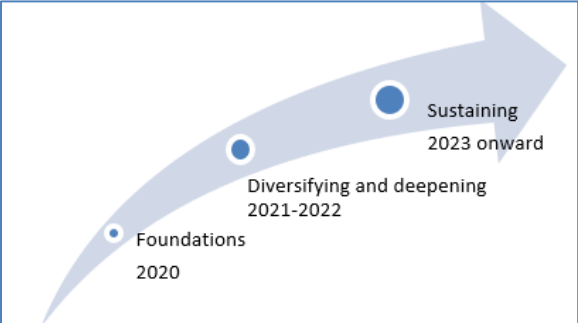
SparkBlue is the Global Policy Network's digital engagement platform, centralizing both internal Communities of Practices and external multi-stakeholder engagements. *SparkBlue* aims to empower staff to think out loud, connect and learn from each other. This offers a key platform to build a SES community of practice, facilitating discussion and shared learning.

Open Access to Learning Resources and Tools

The SES Toolkit provides the one-stop-shop for operational guidance, tools, examples, learning opportunities and other resources. As a public website, the toolkit is accessible to all staff and partners. Guidance materials will reflect lessons learned and will continue to evolve over time. Relevant resources in the Toolkit will be directly linked with ThroughLine and other systems to direct people key SES resources that may be relevant to their work.

5. Key Milestones and Deliverables

Consistent with UNDP's commitment to becoming a learning institution, this strategy aims at being an adaptive instrument that is embedded in the institution's broader efforts on risk-management and will be delivered through a phased approach. The starting point will be to establish **foundational** learning opportunities prior to the launch of the updated SES in Q4 of 2020. **Diversified and deeper** learning opportunities will then be rolled out in the next phase to enable the organization and individuals to continue to grow and deepen capacities to implement the SES. Subsequent years will require

sustained investment in learning and communications to continue foundational learning but also build opportunities for deepened and diversified capacities.

The following tables outline the immediate deliverables and milestones for the foundational elements in 2020 and further expansion of this in 2021-2022. More detailed work plans will be developed annually.

Foundations Prior and alongside the launch of updated SES (2020)	
Deliverables	**Audience**
Train a cadre of internal SES Experts who will have role in SES oversight and support	GPN staff primarily based in the regional hubs
Branding and Communications Materials	Communication materials (flyer, key messages), design of key knowledge products and materials
Webinars on policy updates and the basics	Foundational webinars for programming staff; targeted webinar sessions with RBx Country Oversight and Support Teams, RBx SES focal points
"Bite Size" how-to videos on the basics	Primarily for practitioners, accessible to all staff, partners, consultants
Updated guidance notes, tools and resources in the Toolkit and integrated in *ThroughLine*	Primarily for practitioners, accessible to all staff, partners, consultants

Diversifying and Deepening Expanded and Deeper Learning Opportunities (2021-2022)	
Deliverables	**Audience**
Continued trainings with GPN SES experts who have role in SES oversight and support, expanding specialized skills	GPN staff primarily based in the regional hubs
Mobilization of GPN experts to deliver trainings and support	Cadre of trained experts mobilized through GPN to provide trainings and support to COs, prioritizing high risk programmes/projects
Develop guidance/training on budgeting and costing for SES implementation in projects.	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff
Integration in induction trainings for all new staff	New staff
Facilitated peer-to-peer learning, thematic groups	Practitioners facing immediate and similar challenges
Explore options/need for online certification course	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff
At least 2 facilitated discussions on *SparkBlue*	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff
Integration in RBx, CoP meetings, and other workshops	Tailored to audience and objectives
Monthly webinar series in different languages (foundational, thematic, lessons learned)	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff
Continued development of the SES Toolkit and integration in *ThroughLine*	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff
Continued developed of communication and advocacy materials	Internal and external
"Bite-size" how-to videos on particular issues	Primarily practitioners, open to all staff, partners, consultants
Workshops and Targeted Trainings (identified based on priority capacity needs within regions)	Tailored to audience and objectives, the training and workshops will be focused primarily on high-risk countries and programs, with some flexibility to respond to priority needs/issues identified in discussion with RBx and oversight colleagues.

6.   Resources

The delivery of this strategy will require sustained investment. With a very small HQ SES Team, successful delivery will rely considerably on support from consultants, particularly in early years until a critical mass of expertise is built within UNDP. Therefore, it is anticipated that an **annual investment of $200-$250K** will be needed to cover consultants for trainings and guidance materials, travel, interpretation, communications/design. Specific resource needs will be developed as part of annual work planning processes.