Climate-Neutral Meetings Initiative Brief

RATIONALE

🌀 Background

Since adopting the United Nations Climate Neutral Strategy in 2007, the United Nations Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) has accelerated towards comprehensive climate neutrality by 2020. As the most important regional convening body of intergovernmental meetings in Asia-Pacific, UN Environment's Sustainable United Nations Secretariat selected ESCAP as a pilot location for the development of an Environmental Management System. ESCAP, with the support of UN Environment, is committed to organizing and implementing sustainable, environmentally-friendly and carbon-neutral meetings, taking UN Environment's definition of a sustainable event as a guiding principle (2009): *"A sustainable event is one designed, organized and implemented in a way that minimizes potential negative impacts and leaves a beneficial legacy for the host community and all involved."* ESCAP and the UN-Environment Regional Office for Asia & the Pacific have partnered to develop a methodology for accurate carbon accounting of meetings and related operations, and as a basis for off-setting efforts.

🌀 Previous Applications of the Initiative

The Initiative has been piloted on three meetings organized in the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok from 19 to 21 June 2017: "International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation, and Publication-IAMLADP 2017" and the "Regional Seminar on Innovative Climate Finance Instruments for Financial Institutions," and from 5 to 8 September 2017: "1st Asia-Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment."

"Carbon Footprint Analysis & Climate Neutrality" reports were developed for all meetings featuring advanced carbon accounting and data analysis techniques, which take into account the emission impact of a variety of related activities including: air travel, conference room operations (printed materials, energy use), food/beverages, water use, food and solid waste, accommodation and commuting to UNCC.

Emission Type	IAMLADP 2017	%	CF Regional Seminar	%	AP Ministerial Summit	%
Travel						
Air travel	78.90 tCO2e	84.01%	11.27 tCO2e	67.20%	156.5 tCO2e	77.50%
Local travel	502.75 kgCO2e	0.54%	200.83 kgCO2e	1.20%	76.84 kgCO2e	0.04%
Accommodation	10.98 tCO2e	11.69%	3.73 tCO2e	22.24%	34.96 tCO2e	17.10%
		96.23%		90.64%		94.64%
Food						
Meals	2.59 tCO2e	2.76%	861.6 kgCO2e	5.14%	7.65 tCO2e	3.74%
Food waste	186.77 kgCO2e	0.20%	54.91 kgCO2e	0.33%	622.4 kgCO2e	0.30%
		2.96%		5.47%		4.04%
Conference & Venue related						
Electricity	746.97 kgCO2e	0.80%	633.29 kgCO2e	3.78%	4.56 tCO2e	2.23%
Decorations	15.4 kgCO2e	0.02%	15.4 kgCO2e	0.09%	38.46 kgCO2e	0.02%
Printing	0 kgCO2e	0.00%	8.66 kgCO2e	0.05%	1530.40 kgCO2e	0.07%
Solid Waste	*Not measured*	-	*Not measured*	-	50.244 kgCO2e	0.03%
Water Consumption	*Not measured*	-	*Not measured*	-	4.78 kgCO2e	0.002%
		0.81%		3.92%		2.35%
Total	**93.92 tCO2e**	**100.00%**	**16.77 tCO2e**	**100.00%**	**204.86 tCO2e**	**100.00%**

METHODOLOGY

🌀 Green Meeting Guide

A Green Meeting Guide, specifically tailored to meetings being held in the UNCC, Bangkok and managed by the CMU of ESCAP, has been developed to aid participants' selection of certified green hotels (situated in the vicinity of the UNCC to reduce commuting carbon footprint), local and international travel choices, food and beverage selection, and to provide further information on environmentally-friendly events.

🌀 Carbon Accounting

Carbon accounting follows the principles of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol developed by the World Resources Institute and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and is compatible with ISO 14064. The October 2007 decision of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) limits the minimum boundary of the UN greenhouse gas inventory to emissions from facility operations and travel that can be influenced by management-level decisions. These include emission categories associated with the purchase or generation of electricity and heat and air/ground transportation.

To ensure robust carbon accounting, significant effort is undertaken to ensure the validity of the localized CO_2 equivalences for the included variables: air and local travel, accommodations, food choices, food waste, solid waste, water consumption, decorations and printing, currently optimized for UNCC as the venue location. ICAO methodology is used to calculate the carbon footprint of air travel, while methods recommended by the Green Meetings Guideline are used raise awareness on the carbon footprint.

Emission Calculation & Observation (ECO Tool)

Anchoring the carbon account is the Emission Calculation & Observation (ECO) Tool, an automated data collection tool which collects participant responses, and pre-processes it to minimize time spend on data analysis. It's the first of its kind in the way of "human" resource-efficiency. ECO also has the added feature of housing its "Past Meetings Database," which allows participants to recall their total carbon footprint by providing identifying anonymized traits, i.e. gender, affiliation, country. Further, ECO automatically generates aggregated statistical summaries of emissions categorized by travel, food, and conference/venue-related, stratified by: a. sub-region; b. gender; c. affiliation; and d. participant vs. organizer. Programming is underway to feature the statistical summaries being updated in real-time, to allow participants to visualize the meeting's carbon footprint as it unfolds.

Communication of Results

With further data collected in-house from the meetings' operations with the cooperation of CMU, FMU, and Sodexo, the total carbon footprint of each meeting will be derived within three weeks after the meeting is held with the publishing of a "Carbon Footprint Analysis & Climate Neutrality" report. The "Carbon Footprint Analysis & Climate Neutrality" report provides an overview of the methodology (coverage, data collection and analysis), the results of the carbon accounting and off-setting efforts. It is important to develop a communication campaign to support the initiative – from data collection to analysis and off-setting using various materials, including the Green Meeting Guide, infographic posters, video materials to enhance the overall pursuit towards climate neutral meetings

🌀 Carbon Off-setting Efforts

Once the carbon footprint of an event is calculated, it is recommended that off-setting measures are taken. UNFCCC is supporting a Climate Neutral Now (CNN) initiative, which invites organizations, businesses, cities to measure their climate footprint and report on it, reduce the footprint as much as possible internally, and address unavoidable emissions by purchasing UN Certified Emission Reductions. Further information on the Climate Neutral Now initiative is available on www.climateneutralnow.org. An on-line carbon emissions offsetting platform allowing for the purchase of carbon emissions is available at www.offsetclimateneutralnow.org.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Initiative has thus been piloted on three separate meetings, each providing invaluable learning opportunities. In pursuit of climate neutrality, the following policy recommendations were identified:

Air Travel

Off-setting emissions of meetings need to be adopted as the norm for UN ESCAP, as part of its commitment and its pilot activities in conformance with to the Sustainable United Nations. The options for air travel off-setting and for local emissions off-setting need to be discussed, agreed and well communicated to all participants, including a policy to default to "Economy" class air flight options. There is a need to be sensitized about carbon emission increases for multiple leg-travel vs single leg travel.

Local Travel

To minimize emissions associated with local travel the following options are recommended: include recommended hotels in the immediate vicinity of the UNCC to provide an option of walking to the meeting venue; include hotels that provide shuttle services for a group of participants; and encourage ride-sharing.

Accommodation

There is a need to expand the criteria for hotel section to include: Green Certified Hotels (GCH); hotels that calculate their emissions; provide shuttle transport to UN; and those in walking distance to the UNCC.

Food Behavior

To further sensitize and explain the positive financial, carbon footprint, and health impact of developing a wider variety of plant-based catering options, there is an opportunity for joint training sessions between UN-ESCAP and Sodexo. To reduce the dependency on bottled water, water dispenser density throughout the UNCC needs to increase.

Food Waste

Based on the success story of the partnership with the Thai Harvest SOS, a food rescue foundation, Sodexo, UN-ESCAP and UN-Environment can further pursue this option as a more permanent for the operations of the food catering, thereby reducing food waste generated by food providers.

Electricity

To reduce the loan on the A/C system, options should be pursued to raise ambient temperature by 3-5 degrees Celsius higher in the meeting rooms. A good entry point is to follow-up on the carbon footprint and overall electricity consumption during meetings when temperatures are higher. There is a need to analyze whether there is a significant reduction on electricity in the meeting venue if air conditioning efforts are minimized.

Solid Waste

There is an opportunity for joint training sessions between UN-ESCAP and Sodexo about the carbon implications of automatically providing lids/napkins with every purchase. Additionally, UN-ESCAP's office paper is not 100% recycled, revealing an excellent opportunity for Procurement Division to secure recycled paper for all printing needs. Additionally, there is a need to initiate monitoring of plastic waste which and improve recycling waste collection stations and waste-sorting capacities of UNCC.

General Policy Setting

To improve collective ownership over the Initiative, there is potential to assign Divisional Focal points to promote application of various measures towards climate neutrality, including designation of resources. In pursuit of climate neutrality for the UN Secretariat, a valid next-step would be to develop an internal analysis of staffs' CO2 impact to raise awareness about green choices, and promote the Initiatives' objectives from within. A comprehensive campaign can be developed to raise awareness about the positive carbon footprint impact of healthy, green behaviors, including active use of social media.