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Cross-sectoral activities: education for sustainable development

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Implementing the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development post 2015

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document provides background information on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development beyond 2015. It outlines major relevant processes at the global level and recalls past mandates issued by high-level meetings of education and environment ministries.

The document moreover presents a proposal of the UNECE Steering Committee for Education for Sustainable Development to hold a high-level segment of education and environment ministries at the next “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference.

The UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy will be invited to take into account the present note when discussing about the Eighth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development is the regional implementation pillar of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). The Vilnius framework of implementation adopted by ministries of education and environment in 2005 sets out three implementation phases for the Strategy. In 2015 the third phase comes to an end.
2. At the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2007, ministers confirmed their commitment to implement the Strategy until 2015.
3. In March 2013, the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, at its eighth meeting, voiced its commitment to continue implementing the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development beyond the third phase of implementation and agreed that a high-level segment of education and environment

ministries should be held at the next EfE Ministerial Conference, if possible. To that end, the secretariat should take all necessary steps to inform the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) about the wish of the Steering Committee to hold such a segment.

4. To facilitate the discussion by CEP, this information paper outlines major relevant processes on the global level, recalls past mandates and presents the proposal of the Steering Committee to organize such a high level segment.

II. Global agenda on education for sustainable development

A. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: underscoring the vital role of education for sustainable development

5. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), held in Rio de Janeiro, States took a strong stand for promoting education for sustainable development (ESD) and integrating sustainable development more actively into education, including beyond the United Nations Decade of ESD.

6. The Rio+20 outcome document, *The Future We Want*, recognizing that “younger generations are the custodians of the future”, makes the link between the need for better quality education and ESD. In it, States commit to improving “the capacity of our education systems to prepare people to pursue sustainable development” (A/RES/66/288, para. 230). This includes the development of “sustainability curricula” and of “training programmes that prepare students for careers in fields related to sustainability” (ibid.). The importance of non-formal education in pursuit of sustainable development is also recognized.

7. A whole-institution approach to ESD — “teaching sustainable development as an integrated component across all disciplines” together with “sustainability management” on the campus and engagement with the community (ibid., para. 234) — is particularly encouraged for education institutions. Research and innovation for sustainable development, including in education, are also highlighted, as well as programmes in the areas of “entrepreneurship and business skills training, professional, technical and vocational training and lifelong learning” with a view to “bridging skills gaps for advancing national sustainable development objectives” (ibid., para. 235). Information, education and training on sustainability to strengthen the capacities of workers are referred to in the context of green economy policies.

8. Finally, in the outcome document States commit to strengthening ESD beyond the United Nations Decade of ESD, which ends in 2014 (ibid., para. 233).

B. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Towards a programme framework on education for sustainable development

9. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference during its thirty-sixth session in 2011 considered follow-up to the United Nations Decade of ESD. It requested the UNESCO Director-General to develop options for transforming the Decade of ESD into an institutionalized process beyond 2014 (36 C/Resolution 16).

10. In 2012, the UNESCO Executive Board at its 190th session considered the options for follow-up presented by the UNESCO Director General and expressed its preference for a programme framework as a follow-up to the United Nations Decade.

11. The UNESCO Executive Board requested the Director-General to develop the proposal for a programme framework, led by UNESCO, which should cover at least the period for 2014–2021, address education at all levels and in all forms, and be based on a comprehensive sustainable development agenda, while also encouraging strategic focus and national commitment.

12. To develop, in consultation with member States, and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the proposal for a programme framework, UNESCO organized consultation meetings in all five United Nations regions. The regional consultation meeting on ESD for the North American and European countries was organized jointly with UNECE on 22 March 2013.

13. The UNESCO Executive Board requested the UNESCO Director-General to submit the proposal for a programme framework to the Executive Board at its 192nd session and to the General Conference at its thirty-seventh session in 2013, with a view to transmitting it to the United Nations General Assembly for a decision at its sixty-ninth session in 2014 in order to ensure seamless follow-up to the United Nations Decade of ESD (190 EX/9).

III. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: Mandate and implementation framework for education for sustainable development

14. The UNECE Strategy for ESD was adopted by UNECE ministers, vice-ministers and other representatives of environment and education ministries in Vilnius in 2005. They also adopted the Vilnius Framework for Implementation, setting up a Steering Committee to facilitate coordination and review of Strategy's implementation. The Vilnius Framework also defines three phases of implementation, with the third phase running until 2015.

15. At the Sixth Efe Ministerial Conference, held in Belgrade in 2007, a joint session of ministers of education and environment was held on ESD. The ministers agreed that the UNECE Strategy for ESD remained a unique example of the regional implementation of ESD among the different initiatives developed in the framework of the United Nations Decade of ESD, and that it could serve as an example for other regions.

16. In their Joint Statement on ESD (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/4/Add.1), the ministers expressed their commitment to the further implementation of the Strategy for ESD in the region and extended the mandate of the Steering Committee on ESD to oversee the regional implementation of the Strategy until 2015.

17. Ministers furthermore confirmed their vision of a future that embraces the common values of solidarity, equality and mutual respect between people, countries and generations, and underscored the importance of the principle of sustainable development as the key to a globalization that secures environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources, poverty eradication and sustainable consumption and production, and enhances justice and civil rights, gender equality and the rights of children. Significantly, they reaffirmed the importance of ESD as a tool for capacity-building that enables people to make this vision a reality. They also underlined that the regional work on ESD furthers the implementation of the relevant outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and brings a substantive contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the United Nations Decade of ESD.

18. Moreover, UNECE ministers decided that additional future ministerial segments should be held on a regular basis, preferably at the EfE conferences, as appropriate, providing a broad framework bringing together a wide range of stakeholders.

IV. Holding a high level segment on education for sustainable development for putting in place a post- 2015 implementation framework

19. At its eighth meeting, the UNECE Steering Committee for ESD reaffirmed its decision to continue implementing the Strategy beyond 2015 and decided to develop a future implementation framework for it following the third phase.

20. In addition, the Steering Committee agreed that a high-level segment of education and environment ministries should be held at the next EfE Ministerial Conference. To that end, the secretariat should take all necessary steps to inform CEP and its Bureau about the wish of the Steering Committee to hold such a segment.

21. Concerning the further work process, the Steering Committee decided that the Bureau of the Committee would undertake the work and assume the responsibility for the development of a proposed framework of implementation that would allow continuing the implementation of the Strategy for ESD beyond 2015.

22. The Steering Committee agreed that the proposed implementation framework should include the following topics: (a) a common vision; (b) a governance body; (c) priorities; (d) financing; and (e) a time frame. It was underscored that the priority action areas of implementation phase III should continue to be at the core of UNECE ESD work. The implementation framework should be closely linked to the post-Decade of ESD programme framework UNESCO was currently developing. In particular, the reporting requirements should be closely aligned.
