



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CEP/AC.13/2004/2
19 April 2004

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

First regional meeting on education for sustainable development
Geneva, 19-20 February 2004

REPORT OF THE MEETING

1. The first regional meeting on education for sustainable development was held from 19 to 20 February 2004, in Geneva.
2. The meeting was attended by delegates from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.
3. The following specialized agency was represented at the meeting: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).
4. The following intergovernmental organization was represented: Council of Europe.
5. The Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE) and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) were represented, as were the following non-governmental organizations: Borrowed Nature Association, Copernicus-Campus, European ECO-Forum and Forum for the Future.

I. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The meeting was opened by Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the Environment and Human Settlements Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), who delivered a welcome speech. Having received a mandate from the Environment Ministers at the "Environment for Europe" Conference in Kiev in May 2003, the Committee on Environmental Policy at its tenth session (20-22 October 2003) had agreed to set up an open-ended task force on education for sustainable development to develop a strategy for education for sustainable development and two countries, the Russian Federation and Sweden, were leading the process.

7. Mr. Bärlund stressed that the meeting was for the first time bringing together representatives of environment and education ministries as well as other bodies working in education from all subregions of UNECE to work together for education for sustainable development. Since education for sustainable development was very complex and required close cooperation among all stakeholders at different levels, it was very important that UNESCO, the Council of Europe, regional environmental centres and NGOs joined the process. UNECE was looking forward to receiving contributions from other international organizations too. This initiative would be a regional contribution to the upcoming United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which would start in 2005.

8. As this was a new activity for UNECE the matter of raising funds was crucial. Mr. Bärlund thanked the Governments of Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom for their generous financial contributions and pledges to the education for sustainable development process. He also invited more donors to come forward.

9. The Task Force adopted its agenda (CEP/AC.13/2004/1).

II. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

10. The Task Force elected Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden), Director at the International Division, Ministry of Environment, as its Chair, and Mr. Nikolay Kasimov (Russian Federation), Dean, Faculty of Geography, Lomonosov Moscow State University, as its Vice-Chair.

11. Mr. Kahn thanked the Task Force for electing him and expressed the hope that the meeting would give an opportunity to all delegates to share their thoughts about education for sustainable development and would contribute substantially to the development and implementation of education for sustainable development in the region.

III. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE TASK FORCE

12. The Task Force considered its draft terms of reference as set out in document CEP/AC.13/2004/4 and adopted them without amendment.

13. On the basis of the consultations by the Chair and proposals submitted to the secretariat, the Task Force set up a drafting group to help prepare the strategy. Representatives of international organizations and major groups were invited to join it. The composition of the drafting group took into account the geographical representation of UNECE member States and the experience of its members in national and international education policies and in sustainable

development. Since English was to be the working language for the group, knowledge of it was also one of the criteria. The drafting group was made up as follows: Armenia, the Czech Republic, Greece, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Sweden, the United Kingdom, CAREC and European ECO-Forum. It was agreed that CAREC would convey to the drafting group the views of the Governments of countries in Central Asia. Some countries, including France, informed the secretariat of their willingness to assist in the drafting process via electronic mail.

IV. WORK PROGRAMME OF THE TASK FORCE

14. The Task Force adopted its work programme as contained in document CEP/AC.13/2004/5. The meetings of the drafting group would take place in March and April 2004. The second meeting of the Task Force would take place in July 2004 and the Government of Italy kindly offered to consider the possibility of hosting this meeting. It would confirm this to the secretariat in due course. At its second meeting the Task Force would discuss and approve the draft strategy and submit it to the Committee on Environmental Policy at its eleventh session for comments. A joint high-level meeting of environment ministries and education ministries or equivalent State bodies responsible for education in UNECE member States might be convened in February 2005 to adopt the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development. Governments were invited to consider the possibility of hosting this meeting.

15. The delegation of Sweden provided information about the upcoming International Forum on education for sustainable development "Learning to Change Our World", which would take place in Gottenburg (Sweden) on 4-7 May 2004. The delegation of Greece informed the Task Force about the side event on education for sustainable development that would be organized by its Government in cooperation with the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development, UNESCO and UNECE during the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development on 28 April 2004 in New York.

16. The Task Force also considered possible input to the International Conference on Education that UNESCO was organizing (Geneva, September 2004). Sweden would explore the possibility of presenting the UNECE initiative on education for sustainable development to the Conference. It would provide the Task Force with more information at its second meeting.

V. DRAFT STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

17. This session was divided into two blocks: (a) brief presentations of national and other experiences relevant to the UNECE process on education for sustainable development and (b) discussion of the draft strategy for education for sustainable development.

A. Brief presentations of national and other experiences relevant to the UNECE process on Education for Sustainable Development

18. Delegates participated actively in the discussion and shared their experiences and good practices in education for sustainable development.

19. UNESCO expressed its appreciation for the work on education for sustainable development undertaken within the UNECE region. It informed the Task Force that the international draft framework of implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was being finalized and invited countries and organizations to provide their comments on this document by the end of April 2004. It stressed that the education for sustainable development process was of equal importance for both North and South, for rich and poor, and that closer and more efficient cooperation among all stakeholders was needed. It underlined that the absence of an agreed definition of education for sustainable development, confusion in the understanding of environmental education and education for sustainable development and the links between them, as well as the understanding of education for sustainable development as a dynamic concept, hindered international cooperation on this issue. It also considered that poverty, gender equity and human rights were not adequately addressed by the countries within the concept of education for sustainable development.

20. The Task Force exchanged information on different issues and national activities relevant to education for sustainable development. There was general consensus that education for sustainable development was a priority for the region. Most countries had established education systems, ensured access to basic education, equal rights to education for girls and boys, professional educators, and developed a scientific potential and the active participation of civil society. However, education systems were often too rigid for the integrative and cross-cutting nature of education for sustainable development. Few member States had adapted the institutional and policy frameworks to the needs of education for sustainable development. Some countries used councils on sustainable development as a coordination body, but some had already established new mechanisms, such as task forces and platforms. The national policy documents that usually addressed education for sustainable development and/or environmental education were strategic programmes on sustainable development, programmes for poverty eradication, action plans and Local Agenda 21. In many countries education for sustainable development was still perceived as environmental education. However, the Task Force agreed that there was a need to treat them as two different concepts. Another concern was that education for sustainable development was not included in national legislation in many countries, while environmental education was often addressed by laws or other regulatory documents.

21. Delegates provided information on subregional cooperation. The experiences and needs were different in different parts of UNECE. Therefore, the situation in terms of education for sustainable development also varied from subregion to subregion. There were several successful examples in the region, including the Central Asian intergovernmental process on environmental education and the Programme Baltic 21-education for sustainable development. Ensuring the funds for implementing education for sustainable development was a challenge for East European, Caucasian, Central Asian and Balkan countries.

22. The Task Force considered that multi-stakeholder cooperation and enhancing formal, non-formal and informal learning could help to ensure successful education for sustainable development. Representatives of NGOs, RECs and the Council of Europe also shared their experiences in education for sustainable development. Forum for the Future presented guidelines on education for sustainable development in higher education. European ECO-Forum introduced a study on the priorities and needs of education for sustainable development in Bulgaria, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. The study was sponsored by the United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. REC-CEE provided information on

learning materials that had been developed for its Green Pack project. The Council for Europe briefed the Task Force on the links between tourism and education for sustainable development.

23. It was generally recognized that various projects were taking place in the region and that these experiences were rich and unique. The Task Force agreed that an efficient mechanism for sharing information and good practices was needed. The majority spoke in favour of developing a set of good practices in education for sustainable development. At the proposal of the delegation of Italy, it was agreed that, as a first step, UNECE would post information on regional experiences in education for sustainable development on its website. To this end, delegates were invited to provide the secretariat with a summary (up to two pages) of their experiences.

B. Discussion of the draft strategy for education for sustainable development

24. In consultation with the lead countries, the UNECE secretariat had prepared a draft strategy (CEP/AC.13/2004/3), in accordance with the Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/102/Rev.1), the Basic elements for the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development (ECE/CEP/102/Add.1) and the UNESCO draft international implementation scheme on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

25. The Chair introduced the draft strategy and invited the Task Force to comment on it. All delegates participated in the discussion. The draft strategy was well received and regarded as an important and timely document. The Task Force expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for the document and expressed its satisfaction that the paper addressed all the important issues of implementing education for sustainable development.

26. Delegates provided a number of comments on the document. The majority supported the long-term strategic approach for the entire region. At the same time, many stressed that subregional needs should be given more explicit attention. The global context of issues related to education for sustainable development should receive proper attention. Some delegates asked for a more explicit reflection in the document of the specifics of education for sustainable development governance in countries with federal structures.

27. The Task Force noted that environmental education had received more attention in the document than education on various social and economic issues, and stressed that this should be balanced. Concern was also expressed about the links between formal, non-formal and informal education. In this respect, it was suggested to strengthen the coherence between these three forms of education. Some suggested that the use of the broader term “learning” would make it more open to society and would shift the focus from the educators to the learners.

28. Many delegates spoke in favour of establishing a partnership mechanism among different ministries to coordinate the implementation of the strategy, rather than assigning the ministry of education to lead the process. Some delegates suggested having joint leadership by the ministries of environment and education. The majority welcomed the draft strategy’s multi-stakeholder approach to this cooperation and asked for this issue to be given more attention. Delegates stressed that trade unions, and various communities, including communities of indigenous people, should play an important role in education for sustainable development and that this should be better reflected.

29. Delegates asked for further elaboration of the chapters on the strategy's implementation and assessing its implementation. This included, in particular, priorities, timing and indicators.

30. Many comments reflected the differences in understanding of some terms. In several cases this incoherence was a result of the translation from English to Russian. Many delegates spoke in favour of preparing accompanying documents on the background of the education for sustainable development process and clarifying some terms used in the draft strategy to facilitate understanding of the draft strategy and its further implementation.

31. Comments were also made on a number of other issues, including the importance of behaviour, attitudes, values and self-assessment for and in education for sustainable development. Some delegates mentioned the importance of providing educators with guidance for implementing education for sustainable development, which had been reflected in the Basic elements for the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development.
