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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Eighth meeting

Geneva, 21 and 22 March 2013

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Round table: Promoting education for sustainable development on the regional level beyond implementation phase III

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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document aims to facilitate the discussion by the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development at its eighth meeting on the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development beyond 2015. It outlines major relevant processes at the global level, recalls past mandates issued by high-level meetings of education and environment ministries and lists relevant future milestones for education for sustainable development. Against this background, the Steering Committee is invited to consider discussing the following issues for action:

- (a) Thematic priorities of a post-2015 framework for implementation;
- (b) The format, time frame and resource implications of a post-2015 implementation framework, as well as the process for developing it;
- (c) The governance structure of a post-2015 framework.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) 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” Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2007, ministers confirmed their commitment to implement the Strategy until 2015.
3. At its seventh meeting, in March 2012, the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development voiced its commitment to continue implementing the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development beyond the third phase of implementation. As a follow-up, the Committee is invited to discuss steps to be taken towards developing a post-2015 implementation framework at its eighth meeting.
4. To facilitate the discussion, this background paper outlines major relevant processes on the global level, recalls past mandates issued by high-level meetings of education and environment ministries and lists relevant future milestones for education for sustainable development (ESD).

II. Global agenda on education for sustainable development post 2014

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 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. The outcome document furthermore recognizes the usefulness of a limited set of concrete sustainable development goals, which should be integrated into the United Nations development agenda after 2015 and drive the achievement and mainstreaming of sustainable development. Their development should be guided by the outcome document, that is, goals will presumably be formulated on the basis of the thematic areas mentioned in the document.

9. The outcome document very generally states that the process for elaborating the sustainable development goals must be coherent with the deliberations on the post-2015 development agenda. This will obviously have to be closely monitored in the context of the development of follow-up to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, universal primary education, and in order to ensure ESD is taken into account in any post-2015 development/sustainable development agenda.

10. 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

11. 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).

12. 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.

13. The UNESCO Executive Board requested the Director-General to develop, in consultation with member States, and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, 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.

14. In addition, the Board requested the UNESCO Director-General to submit the proposal 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

15. The UNECE¹ Strategy for ESD was adopted by ECE ministers, vice-ministers and other representatives of environment and education ministries in Vilnius in 2005. They also

¹ UNECE is sometimes used as an informal acronym for the United Nations Economic Commission for

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.

16. At the Sixth "Environment for Europe" 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.

17. 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.

18. 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 MDGs and the United Nations Decade of ESD.

19. Moreover, ECE ministers decided that additional future ministerial segments should be held on a regular basis, preferably at the "Environment for Europe" conferences, as appropriate, providing a broad framework bringing together a wide range of stakeholders.

IV. Issues for action for putting in place a post- 2015 implementation framework

20. At its seventh meeting, the Steering Committee expressed its strong support for continuing to implement the Strategy for ESD beyond 2015. In order to extend the mandate and put into place a post-2015 implementation framework, the Steering Committee is invited to consider the following issues for action:

(a) *Thematic priorities of a post-2015 framework for implementation:* relevant sources to inform the setting of priorities, format and time frame of a post-2015 framework include the priorities of the third phase of implementation and the results of the third round of national implementation reporting (2014);

(b) *Format, time frame and resource implications of a post-2015 implementation framework, as well as the process for developing it:* relevant sources to inform the format and time frame include the time frame and priorities of the UNESCO framework programme on ESD that is expected to follow the United Nations Decade of ESD and the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2014. Given that some of the relevant information will only become available over the course of the next two years, the Committee could consider mandating a working group to work via electronic means, in

Europe to avoid confusion with other regional mechanisms.

close cooperation with the Bureau and the secretariat, on a first draft of a post-2015 implementation framework to be considered at the ninth Steering Committee meeting in 2014. In addition, the Steering Committee should take into account the resource requirements of a post-2015 implementation framework;

(c) *Governance structure of a post-2015 framework*: the Belgrade High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries mandated the Steering Committee to govern the implementation of the Strategy until 2015; for an extension of the mandate a new high-level meeting has to be convened, e.g., in 2015 back to back to an “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference. The Steering Committee might consider kicking off the preparation process for such a high-level meeting.

Annex

Relevant milestones in education for sustainable development 2013-2015

When discussing further steps towards a post-2015 implementation framework, it might be useful to take into account the following upcoming events and their expected outcomes, as set out in the table below.

<i>Event</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Expected outcome</i>
Regional level		
Ninth Steering Committee meeting	April 2014	To be discussed
Third national implementation reporting under UNECE Strategy for ESD	Preliminary timeline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation: ninth Steering Committee meeting 2014 • Deadline for submitting national reports: September 2014 • Final synthesis report available: March 2015 	Report outlining achievements and unmet targets as well as challenges in implementing the UNECE Strategy for ESD
Tenth Steering Committee meeting	April 2015	To be discussed
Global level		
UNESCO General Conference, thirty-seventh session	November 2013	Consideration of proposal for a global ESD programme framework, led by UNESCO, which should address education at all levels and in all forms, and be based on a comprehensive sustainable development agenda
United Nations General Assembly, sixty-ninth session	September 2014	Decision on global post-Decade of ESD programme framework proposal
World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development	November 2014	The Conference will celebrate the successes of the Decade for ESD, but also analyse obstacles encountered and lessons learned. Examples of good practice from all over the world will provide insight into viable approaches to ESD and help to identify key areas for future action.