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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

Extension of the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Committee on Environmental Policy, at its fifteenth session in April 2008, agreed on the revised terms of reference for the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/CEP/148, annex III) for 2009–2011. By that decision, the Committee was to review the terms of reference of the Working Group in two years, after the adoption by the Committee of the Working Group's work programme (para. 8).

The present document contains a review of the Working Group's achievements for the previous period, and presents, in an annex, a draft decision on the renewal of its mandate for a further two-year period, for the consideration of the Committee on Environmental Policy at its eighteenth session.

Achievements of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in 2009–2011

1. To implement its terms of reference for the biennium 2009–2011 (ECE/CEP/148, annex III) and its programme of work (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2008/2, annex I), the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment undertook a series of activities focusing on improving environmental observations, data collection and reporting capacities in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. It reported annually to the Committee on progress made to that end. The main results are presented below.
2. The Working Group prepared two sets of guidelines for developing national strategies to use monitoring as an environmental policy tool in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and of South-Eastern Europe. The guidelines on air-quality monitoring (ECE/CEP/2009/10) were adopted by the Extended Bureau of the Committee at its meeting in March 2010 (ECE/CEP/2010/1 and Corr.1, para. 23). The Committee adopted the Guidelines on water-quality monitoring (ECE/CEP/S/2011/5) at its special session in May 2011 (ECE/CEP/S/2011/2).
3. The Working Group reviewed progress made by Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine in the implementation of the recommendations on environmental monitoring and assessment in the second Environmental Performance Reviews of those countries, and provided guidance to these countries on how better to implement the recommendations.
4. At its annual sessions, the Working Group considered the latest developments in environmental monitoring and assessment at the national, subnational and company levels. Written contributions by countries, which served as the basis for discussions, provided information on ongoing and planned actions regarding the modernization and upgrading of national monitoring networks; the development of inventories of air emissions, wastewater discharges and waste; the improvement of data handling; the enhancement of institutional mechanisms for data sharing and exchange; the publication of environmental assessments; and reporting to multilateral environmental agreements. The discussions helped to exchange best experiences and good practices, as well as to identify specific problems in some countries which needed to be resolved with the support from the international community.
5. Owing to resource constraints, activities on environmental reporting by enterprises and on ecosystem-based assessments were limited to reviewing some country experiences and approaches applied at the international level. The Working Group considered legal and regulatory requirements that had been established in several member countries of the European Union and in the United States of America to support frameworks for corporate environmental reporting. It also considered the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on its European and global integrated environment assessments, and development by the European Environment Agency (EEA) of the European Ecosystem Assessment (Eureca) project.
6. The Working Group also made contributions to strengthening and better coordinating multilateral efforts in the areas of environmental monitoring, data collection, assessment and reporting to the international community, including the implementation of relevant decisions by the “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conferences.

7. It kept under review progress made in other international environmental assessments and data collection activities, e.g., the *Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the UNEP *Global Environment Outlook-5*, the development of a pan-European environment and health information system by the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health, and the Questionnaire on Environment Statistics of United Nations Statistics Division and UNEP. The Working Group explored the synergies between these activities and provided comments.

8. The Working Group also discussed possible approaches to the preparation by EEA of a pan-European assessment report for the seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in Astana in September 2011. Its members provided EEA with support in the preparation of the *Europe’s Environment — An Assessment of Assessments (EE-AoA)* report for the Conference. After the Conference, the Working Group discussed the main conclusions and recommendations of the assessment reports submitted to the Astana Conference, especially those relating to strengthening national capacities for regular production of environmental assessment reports.

9. The above-mentioned results would not have been achieved without donor support from the Netherlands (EUR 20,000) and the Russian Federation (USD 75,000). The funds provided were used to cover travel and subsistence costs of members of the Working Group from the eligible countries, as well as for a consultancy.

10. At its twelfth session in October 2011, the Working Group discussed priorities on which its work programme should focus in the next biennium. It agreed to continue focusing on the main areas covered by its current terms of reference. At the same time, it was proposed that the Working Group should support or initiate some new activities. It should contribute to the establishment by the EEA and its partners, following a decision at the Astana Conference, of a regular process of environmental assessment and the development of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region. The Working Group should also transpose the EE-AoA assessment methodology to the national level, develop guidelines on biodiversity and soil monitoring for the targeted countries and share experiences with modelling, among other things.

11. Also at its twelfth session, the Working Group invited the secretariat to prepare, in consultation with the Bureau and taking into account the discussion on the Working Group’s priorities for the next biennium, revised terms of reference. The resulting terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment are annexed to this note. The Committee is invited to adopt these terms of reference and transmit them to the Executive Committee for endorsement.

Annex

Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy renews the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for 2012–2014. The Working Group should help strengthen environmental information and observation capacity, including monitoring networks, in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Russian Federation, as well as in interested countries of South-Eastern Europe, to make monitoring and assessment an effective instrument in environmental policymaking, and to improve international environmental reporting.

2. The Working Group will promote the coordination of multilateral and bilateral efforts in the above areas, in particular for the implementation of relevant decisions by the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conferences. It should contribute:

(a) To establishing a regular process of environmental assessment and the development of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region jointly with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its partners;

(b) To an appraisal of monitoring and assessment requirements within the framework of the EfE process, as well as national and international monitoring and assessment requirements, including obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

3. The Working Group should promote implementation of recommendations and guidelines on environmental monitoring and assessment adopted by EfE Ministerial Conferences. It should use relevant results of the work of, and cooperate with, other international forums and networks, such as EEA, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health, relevant MEAs, especially those of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Global Earth Observation System of Systems, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and give priority to the following specific areas:

(a) Modernization and upgrading of national monitoring networks and information systems;

(b) Improvement of data collection, transfer and use, and the application of modelling;

(c) Strengthening monitoring of specific environmental media;

(d) Promotion of the use of indicator-based mechanisms for periodic environmental assessments and evaluation of the effectiveness of environmental policies and decision-making;

(e) Improvement of environmental assessments, including the use of the methodology of the *Europe’s Environment — An Assessment of Assessments* report.

4. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group’s activities.

5. The Working Group will be open to all ECE member States and include EEA. In its operation it will be guided by the relevant procedures established by the ECE Executive Committee.

6. Members of the Working Group are officials in ECE countries dealing with environmental monitoring and assessment. The Working Group will involve in its activities experts from statistical agencies, relevant services and major groups.
 7. The ECE secretariat will provide secretariat assistance and conference facilities to the Working Group at the United Nations Office at Geneva, including interpretation and translation, in accordance with ECE rules and practices.
 8. The Committee on Environmental Policy will review the present terms of reference in two years after the adoption by the Committee of the Working Group's work programme.
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