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Ninth meeting
Geneva, 3 and 4 April 2014

Report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development on its ninth meeting

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction.....	1–9	2
A. Attendance.....	3–6	2
B. Organizational matters.....	7–9	2
II. Reporting on progress by member States.....	10–17	3
III. Education for sustainable development competences in technical and vocational education and training.....	18–20	4
IV. Outcomes of the electronic working groups under the Strategy	21–25	4
V. Mandatory national implementation reporting in 2014.....	26–32	5
VI. High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in 2016 and future implementation framework.....	33–40	6
VII. World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2014.....	41–42	9
VIII. Status of the trust fund and resource requirements for 2014–2015.....	43–45	9
IX. Strengthening synergies with other organizations and processes.....	46–48	9
X. Calendar of meetings	49	10



I. Introduction

1. The ninth meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development was held on 3 and 4 April 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. The meeting focused on: (a) member States' progress; (b) education for sustainable development (ESD) competences in technical and vocational education and training (TVET); (c) outcomes of the electronic working groups under the UNECE¹ Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development; (d) mandatory national implementation reporting in 2014; (e) preparing a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries; and (f) contributing to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on ESD. The Committee also addressed the resource requirements necessary to support an efficient management and implementation process for the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

A. Attendance

3. Delegations from the following 27 ECE member States attended the meeting: Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
4. From the United Nations system, representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNESCO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) participated.
5. A representative of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe also attended the meeting.
6. In addition, representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and educational institutions participated: the European ECO Forum; Environment and School Initiatives; Global Action Plan International; Mälardalen University; l'Istituto per l'Ambiente e l'Educazione Scholé Futuro Onlus; Planet'ERE; Regional Centre of Expertise on ESD Kyrgyzstan; Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE); the World Environmental Education Congress; and the World Resources Forum.

B. Organizational matters

7. The Chair of the Committee, Mr. G. Farthing (Canada), opened the meeting. He informed the Committee that a Bureau meeting had taken place on 2 April 2014 in preparation for the Steering Committee meeting, and also thanked the secretariat for its work in preparing the meeting.
8. The Director of the ECE Environment Division made opening remarks.

¹ UNECE is sometimes used as an informal acronym for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to avoid confusion with other regional bodies.

9. The Committee adopted its agenda (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2014/1),² which had been prepared by the secretariat in agreement with the Chair and the Bureau.

II. Reporting on progress by member States

10. The secretariat presented an overview of the informal country reports that had been submitted by 20 countries prior to the meeting, which provided updates on the status of implementation of the Strategy at the national level.³

11. The secretariat noted that the implementation of priority action area (a), ensuring that there was an ESD school plan in every school by 2015, and action area (b), introducing ESD in teacher education, appeared to have gained momentum in the vast majority of countries.

12. Regarding the promotion of ESD school plans, the secretariat noted that throughout phase III whole-school approaches had been increasingly adopted in the ECE region. However, it appeared that whole-school approaches were not being implemented in a majority of schools. Although most countries did not have a monitoring mechanism in place to provide reliable data, judging from the information provided in the informal country reports, it was not likely that the objective of having an ESD school plan installed in every school by 2015 would be reached.

13. With regard to the introduction of ESD in teacher education, the secretariat emphasized that many countries had reported on the important role that legislative frameworks and political leadership played in the systemic inclusion of ESD in teacher education. In-service teacher education or trainings were optional in most countries and few countries presented evidence that trainings were institutionalized and carried out on a continuous basis.

14. The secretariat stressed that there was a significant lack of information and good practice examples for the implementation of priority action area (c), namely, the reorientation of TVET in support of sustainable development and green economies.

15. Considering ESD implementation beyond the third phase of implementation (2011–2015), the secretariat observed that a political commitment or an indication of political will for the continuation of ESD implementation had been reported by 19 out of the 20 reporting countries.

16. In the following discussion, a number of countries gave presentations on particularly relevant activities or on information that had not been included in their country reports.

17. The Committee agreed that the information gathered through the informal country reporting should also inform the evaluation report to be prepared by the secretariat at the end of implementation phase III.

² All meeting documentation for the ninth meeting is available on a dedicated web page: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=34306>.

³ The informal country reports and the text of statements made during the meeting that were provided to the secretariat are available on the meeting web page (“country reports and presentations” tab). The secretariat’s presentation, and presentations made by countries, along with an overview of country resources compiled by the secretariat, are available from http://www.unece.org/esd9scm_ressources.html.

III. Education for sustainable development competences in technical and vocational education and training

18. In preparation for the meeting, the ECE secretariat and UNU-IAS had held a joint electronic consultation, inviting the Community for Regional Centres of Expertise for ESD, which was supported by UNU-IAS, as well as members and observers of the ECE Steering Committee on ESD to jointly explore reorienting TVET systems to support sustainable development in the participating countries.

19. A Senior Researcher at UNU-IAS summarized the outcomes of the electronic consultation.⁴ In the following discussion, a Skills Policies and Systems Specialist at ILO contributed her organization's perspective on the outcomes of the consultation and presented the ILO work on green skills, with a view to identifying points of possible cooperation.

20. In the following discussion, it was argued that all jobs could eventually become green or at least greener, and that TVET could play a very important role in greening the labour market. When transitioning to green economies, TVET had to react to two major changes — the emergence of new and changing occupations and changing requirements for established occupations. It was therefore of utmost importance to reorient TVET to support sustainable development and policy coherence. TVET and its development had to be integrated into all international and national policies related to sustainable development, including environmental, employment and industrial policies. To that end, exchange and cooperation between the TVET sector and institutions working on sustainable development-related policies was crucial. While professional education and training had to meet immediate labour market needs, it should also reach beyond them to address competences and skills required for sustainable development and making a livelihood in the long term. In that context, it was emphasized that the reorientation of TVET needed to be understood as a transformative process, which included immediately required green skills, but was not limited to them. Incorporating ESD into TVET was about creating a practical pathway to environmental and economic sustainability.

IV. Outcomes of the electronic working groups under the Strategy

21. Following the mandate given by the Steering Committee at its eighth meeting, electronic working sessions were held on ESD school plans and introducing ESD into teacher education.⁵ The Chair thanked all members and observers of the Steering Committee who had contributed to that work and recalled that the outcomes and recommendations made by the working groups had been shared in advance with the Committee, i.e., in Information Papers 3 and 4.

22. The Chair of the electronic working session on ESD school plans gave a detailed presentation on the outcomes of the electronic working sessions.

23. A working group member presented the results of the working group on teacher education.

24. Following the presentations, the Committee welcomed the working groups' outcomes. The Chair introduced a proposal by the Bureau to follow up on the work of the

⁴ A summary of the online consultation is also provided in Information Paper 5.

⁵ Ibid.

electronic working groups by preparing a limited number of case studies on each of the priority action areas, which could explore in depth the successes and challenges faced in a number of countries. The objective of the case studies would be to build on the work of the working groups, to obtain yet more practical information by focusing on implementation, and to underline the importance of the three priority action areas. The opportunity to learn from one another in a very practical way would be at the core of that exercise.

25. In the following discussion, it was suggested that the exercise should initially be open to all countries that wanted to contribute, with a limited number of case studies to be selected from among those submitted to allow for in-depth analysis. The Committee requested the secretariat to develop options concerning the process of selecting and developing such case studies, and to send those options to the Bureau for comments before circulating them to the Committee members for final approval.

V. Mandatory national implementation reporting in 2014

26. The Chair reminded the Committee that, by its terms of reference, the ECE Steering Committee for ESD was charged with monitoring the progress of the implementation of the Strategy for ESD (CEP/AC.13/2005/4/Rev.1, annex I, para. 4 (b)). The assessment for phase III was of particular importance, since it marked the end of the 10-year implementation process for the Strategy. The third progress report would provide an opportunity to directly compare member States' results with those of the previous two reports, providing insights into the implementation of ESD both in each member State and in the ECE region as a whole. Finally, the assessment of progress made and challenges encountered in implementation phase III was vital for setting future priorities in the implementation of ESD.

27. The Chair announced that States participating in the Strategy were due to submit their national implementation reports on 1 November 2014. Reports were expected to reflect the progress made in the implementation of the Strategy at the national/State level during implementation phase III (2011–2015). He also recalled that a set of indicators for reporting had been developed by the ECE Expert Group on Indicators. The reporting format, which was based on that set of indicators, had been slightly updated by the secretariat, in collaboration with the Expert Group, to meet the reporting needs of phase III. All the revisions made were listed in the introduction of the reporting template, "Format for reporting on the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD" (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2014/5).

28. The Chair of the Expert Group on Indicators presented the revised reporting template in detail.

29. In the following discussion, the secretariat informed the Steering Committee about the process of national report submission. To facilitate reporting for ECE member States and the secretariat, members were requested to take note of the following points:

(a) The reporting templates to be used for preparing the national implementation reports (NIRs) contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.13/2014/5 were available in English, French and Russian on the ECE ESD website.⁶ Electronic copies of the reporting template could additionally be requested directly from the secretariat by e-mail (esd@unece.org);

⁶ The Secretariat set up a website dedicated to the mandatory national implementation reporting carried out in 2014. All documents and information related to the reporting process are available from <http://www.unece.org/2014esdreporting.html>.

(b) The deadline for submission of the national implementation reports to the secretariat was 1 November 2014;

(c) Reports should be submitted to the secretariat electronically in Word format by e-mail (esd@unece.org);

(d) The text of the report should be in English. Member States were encouraged to provide the text in the two other official languages of the ECE, French and Russian. Reports would be made available in the languages in which they were received. No editing or formatting would be provided;

(e) ECE member States should prepare reports through a transparent, consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders at the national/State level. Countries with a federal structure would submit one consolidated report based on subnational/State inputs;

(f) The secretariat would post the phase III reports on a dedicated web page for the 2014 NIRs once they were received;

(g) A synthesis report would equally be prepared for the third national implementation reporting, highlighting progress made, identifying challenges and providing recommendations;

(h) For further assistance, member States could consult the information web page on the 2014 NIRs.⁷ The guidance for reporting (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/5), which had been developed for the previous NIRs, and which included detailed information on the indicators of the reporting template, was available on the same website;

(i) In May 2014, the secretariat would send out letters to focal points requesting the completion of the NIRs by the 1 November deadline.

30. The secretariat moreover recalled that, based on the information gathered through the NIRs, an evaluation report would be prepared. In that connection, the Bureau had proposed that the evaluation report should focus mainly on phase three and be generally future-oriented.

31. The Chair of the Steering Committee announced that the provincial government of Manitoba, Canada, had offered to support the development of the final monitoring and evaluation report by supplying a staff person from Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning to take on the task of writing the evaluation report together with the ECE secretariat.

32. The Steering Committee expressed its full support for the Bureau's proposal concerning the contents of the third evaluation report and gratefully accepted Manitoba's offer of assistance in drafting the third evaluation report.

VI. High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in 2016 and future implementation framework

33. The Chair recalled that, at its eighth meeting in March 2013, the Steering Committee had voiced its strong commitment to continue implementing the Strategy for ESD on the regional level beyond implementation phase III (see ECE/CEP/AC.13/2013/2, paras. 37–44). To assess the progress made under the Strategy, and to consider the continuation of the Strategy's implementation, the Steering Committee had proposed to

⁷ Ibid.

hold a high-level session of education and environment ministries at the next “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conference. The secretariat had been asked to take all the necessary steps to inform the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and its Bureau about the Steering Committee’s proposal.

34. The secretariat informed the Committee that it had presented the Committee’s proposal to CEP at its nineteenth session (Geneva, 22–25 October 2013), and that CEP had supported the proposal to organize a high-level meeting of education and environment ministries in the framework of the next EfE Conference, as appropriate, in order to assess 10 years of ESD implementation and to consider the future implementation of the Strategy for ESD.

35. The Committee reconfirmed its strong commitment to continuing implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD beyond 2015.

36. The Committee decided that two more Steering Committee meetings would take place in the current format until the next EfE Ministerial Conference, i.e., in 2015 and 2016, and reconfirmed its decision to prepare a high-level meeting thereafter, including the preparation of a draft implementation framework for the future implementation of the Strategy and a draft ministerial declaration.

37. The Committee considered basic elements of the future implementation framework based on proposals made by the Bureau and agreed upon the following:

(a) The Steering Committee should continue to coordinate the implementation of the Strategy on the regional level;

(b) Focal Points from environment and education ministries should remain at the core of the Steering Committee; however, countries should have the explicit option of including other ministries in their delegations, depending on their country situation. National UNESCO Commission representatives should also be invited to participate in the process to ensure the close alignment with the global ESD process;

(c) The framework should foresee annual Steering Committee meetings, which could be held either in person or electronically. The Committee expressed a clear preference for in-person meetings. However, taking into account both environmental and financial considerations, the framework should also mention the option of holding an electronic Steering Committee meeting every other year;

(d) The tasks of the Steering Committee should include:

(i) Coordinating with other international processes;

(ii) Assessing progress made;

(iii) Proposing priorities for actions;

(iv) Identifying issues and proposing corrective measures;

(v) Liaising and cooperating closely with relevant intergovernmental organizations and NGOs;

(vi) Keeping CEP and other relevant bodies informed about its activities;

(vii) Establishing ad hoc working groups, task forces and other bodies, as needed, to implement the activities;

(viii) Providing guidance on the need for possible new instruments promoting ESD;

(ix) Serving as a forum for the consideration of issues related to ESD at the regional and international levels;

- (x) Liaising, as required, with the other regional commissions, including those of the United Nations, on matters related to its competence;
- (xi) Ensuring the accountability of member States in implementing the Strategy;
- (e) Concerning priority action area (a), ensuring there was an ESD school plan in every school by 2015, the future framework should:
 - (i) Highlight that implementing ESD school planning was an ongoing process;
 - (ii) Expand the focus on schools to other forms and institutions of education, in particular to pre-school and higher education;
 - (iii) Extend the deadline for ensuring that there was an ESD school plan in every school;
- (f) With regard to the priority action area (b), promoting the introduction of ESD into teacher education, the future framework should:
 - (i) Continue to focus on teacher education;
 - (ii) Highlight the key means for implementing and aspects for promoting the introduction of ESD into teacher education, also taking into account the limited financial resources of the UNECE Trust Fund for ESD for teacher education;
- (g) Regarding priority action area (c), reorienting TVET towards sustainable development and green economies, the future framework should:
 - (i) Request member States to nominate a TVET expert who could advise the Focal Points on the implementation of priority action area (c);
 - (ii) Facilitate more active involvement of professional unions and vocational training centres.
- (h) Implementation phase III had been extended until the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, expected to take place in 2016. The length and focus of the implementation period thereafter would be further discussed in the two remaining Steering Committee meetings. For discussion, time frames of 5 and 10 years had been mentioned;
 - (i) Concerning monitoring and assessment of future implementation, the preferred option was to combine the UNESCO scheme with the ECE set of indicators, to align the two processes while also allowing comparability of reporting outcomes with previous ECE national implementation reporting exercises;
 - (j) Additional issues of importance for the further development of the future implementation framework mentioned during the discussion included:
 - (i) Extending the focus on formal education to also address informal and non-formal education;
 - (ii) Highlighting the important role of networks, including those of civil society, academia and science, NGOs, companies and enterprises.

38. The Committee requested the secretariat to revise the current draft of the future implementation framework in the light of the above discussion outcomes and to circulate it to the Committee for information.

39. The Bureau was mandated to further flesh out the draft future implementation framework for submission to the Steering Committee at its next meeting, in 2015, taking into account the outcomes of the national implementation reporting carried out in 2014 and the of the World Conference on ESD (Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, 10–12 November 2014), as

well as other relevant international processes. To that end, a Bureau meeting would be held in spring 2015.

40. Also, the Bureau together with the secretariat was requested to write a brief background paper outlining a number of possible scenarios for the future work of the Steering Committee, which would be sent to the Steering Committee members.

VII. World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in 2014

41. A Programme Specialist of the UNESCO Section for ESD updated the Steering Committee on the preparation process for the UNESCO World Conference on ESD and invited the secretariat to contribute to the Conference as co-facilitator of a workshop.

42. The Steering Committee decided to contribute to the UNESCO World Conference as co-facilitator of a workshop, as well as to possibly contribute to or organize a side event and participate in other workshops and side events, as appropriate. The Committee mandated the secretariat to follow up accordingly.

VIII. Status of the Trust Fund and resource requirements for 2014–2015

43. Reporting on the status of the ESD trust fund, the secretariat noted that it had made successful efforts to raise funds, pursuant to the request of the Steering Committee at its eighth meeting.

44. The secretariat said that, in view of the current status of the trust fund and contributions that had been pledged, it would most likely be possible to sustain the ECE Professional support for the Strategy until the next Steering Committee meeting. So far, however, there were no funds secured to ensure the servicing of the Strategy between the tenth Steering Committee meeting in 2015 and the high-level meeting for environment and education ministries in 2016.

45. The Steering Committee agreed that a letter should be sent out requesting countries to transfer financial contributions according to the commitment they had made by adopting the Vilnius implementation framework. In the letter, countries would be asked to make commitments to funding the Strategy in 2015 and 2016, setting out also the relevant decisions of the Steering Committee in that regard. The Committee stressed in addition that it was of the utmost importance that countries received formal information about the vision on the future implementation of ESD on the regional and international levels in order to consider possible future funding.

IX. Strengthening synergies with other organizations and processes

46. Noting information provided by the secretariat on the development of future sustainable development goals (SDGs), the Committee mandated the Chair in his upcoming discussions with the ESD Section of UNESCO to stress the importance of promoting the inclusion of ESD (and a holistic understanding thereof) in the future SDGs.

47. Moreover, the Committee noted the importance of countries' promotion of the inclusion of ESD in the SDGs through their national negotiation channels.

48. In the following discussion, a number of stakeholders informed the Steering Committee of national and international activities related to the Strategy's implementation that were planned or currently being carried out. Organizations presenting their activities included the European ECO Forum, Global Action Plan International, the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development Kyrgyzstan, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, UNEP and World Resources Forum.

X. Calendar of meetings

49. The Committee agreed to preliminarily schedule the tenth Steering Committee meeting on 7 and 8 May 2015, with the secretariat to confirm the availability of conference facilities for those dates.
