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Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its eighteenth session in April 2012, the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) highly appreciated the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and adopted the renewed mandate of the Working Group for 2012–2014 as presented in the annex to document ECE/CEP/2012/6 (see ECE/CEP/2012/2, paras. 44, 46, 48 and 92 (m)). According to that decision, CEP was to review the terms of reference of the Working Group in three years.

The present document contains a review of the Working Group's achievements for the current period, and presents, in an annex, a draft decision on the renewal of its mandate for a further two-year period (2015–2016), for the consideration of CEP at its twentieth session.



Achievements of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in 2012–2014

1. In accordance with its terms of reference for the period 2012–2014 (ECE/CEP/2012/6, annex), the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment undertook a series of activities focusing on improving environmental observations, data collection, reporting and assessment capacities in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries).¹ It reported annually to the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) on progress made to that end. The main results are presented below.

2. During the period 2012–2014, in accordance with its mandate, the Working Group has been focusing on providing support to establishing a regular process of environmental assessment of high quality and to developing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the target countries. In particular, the Working Group:

(a) Worked closely with the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators and promoted in the target countries the production of indicators in accordance with the revised United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines)² and their sharing through Internet;

(b) Promoted the sharing of good practices, knowledge and experience in preparation of the national state-of-the-environment (SoE) reports. A network of national experts responsible for SoE reporting was established and a meeting was organized for the SoE experts to discuss improvements to the structure, format and completeness of the information included in the SoE reports;

(c) Made an assessment of the status of SoE reporting in the target countries and identified issues hindering preparation of SoE reports of high quality, among them budgetary challenges, procedural gaps in data flows and validation and experience in concise but informative writing for the report. Subsequently, the Group issued a number of recommendations for the countries to enhance reporting and undertook preparations for the workshop on writing for SoE reports;

(d) Promoted the use of the “Europe’s Environment — an Assessment of Assessments (AoA)” report methodology. The Group reviewed the implementation of AoA pilot projects, one for the Republic of Moldova implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre Moldova and one for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan implemented by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia;

(e) Considered the latest developments in environmental monitoring and assessment at the national and subnational levels in support of SEIS at its annual sessions. 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

¹ I.e., Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

² The revised Guidelines are available in the form of an online database from <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>.

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 experiences and good practices, as well as to identify specific problems in some countries which needed to be resolved with the support of the international community.

3. Furthermore, the Working Group prepared two sets of guidelines for developing national strategies to use monitoring as an environmental policy tool in the target countries: guidelines on biodiversity monitoring (ECE/CEP/2013/7) were adopted by CEP at its nineteenth session in October 2013 (ECE/CEP/2013/2, para. 116 (m)); and guidelines on soil contamination monitoring have been submitted to CEP for consideration and adoption at its twentieth session (ECE/CEP/2014/14).

4. The Working Group also kept under review progress made in other international environmental assessments and data collection activities, such as those hosted by: the Task Force on Access to Information of the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters; the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus under the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; the ECE and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Joint Forestry and Timber Section; and the United Nations Statistics Division. In addition, the Working Group was informed about the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) activities related to the preparation of its sixth global assessment report, European Environment Agency (EEA) preparations for the quinquennial European State of the Environment report, trends and prospects, and ECE activities under the Protocol on Water and Health in analysing water quality and health issues in the pan-European region.

5. The above-mentioned activities could not have been undertaken without the generous support of Norway, Switzerland and the Russian Federation. The funds provided were used to cover travel and subsistence costs of members of the Working Group from eligible countries, as well as for necessary consultancies.

6. At its fourteenth session, in October 2011, the Working Group agreed that the priority focus of its work should be on supporting and reviewing progress in applying the various guidelines and methodologies and helping in the development of SEIS. Since this work cannot be completed within the existing mandate, it will need to be extended into the next biennium.

7. Taking into account the priority focus, the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Working Group, prepared the terms of reference, which are annexed to this note. CEP is invited to adopt these terms of reference.

Annex

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

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) renews the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2015–2016.
2. The Working Group should help strengthen environmental observation capacity, including monitoring networks, and establish and maintain effective environmental information systems in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries), to ensure the factual basis for environmental policymaking, and for informing the public about the state of and changes to the environment. In particular, the Working Group should:
 - (a) Support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), in line with the SEIS objectives to underpin regular reporting and assessments in accordance with international monitoring and assessment requirements and obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements, including improvements to:
 - (i) The necessary data collection, where needed, through modernization and upgrading of national monitoring networks,
 - (ii) Information systems,
 - (iii) Institutional cooperation and coordination mechanisms;
 - (b) Help enhance capacities to produce good quality, concise but informative state-of-the-environment reports and other assessments, where relevant, based on the effective use of environmental indicators and their analysis and the application of modelling;
 - (c) Promote the use and implementation of recommendations and guidelines, as well as other methodologies on environmental monitoring and assessment, as endorsed internationally, in particular by Environment for Europe (EfE) ministerial conferences.
3. The Working Group should further contribute to an appraisal of monitoring and assessment requirements within the framework of the EfE process as well as other relevant processes.
4. The Working Group should be open to all ECE member States. Its members should be the officials in ECE countries dealing with environmental monitoring and assessment. It will also involve in its activities experts from the national statistical agencies and other relevant services.
5. In delivering on its mandate, the Working Group should cooperate with international forums and networks, such as, in particular: the European Environment Agency; 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 multilateral environmental agreements, especially those of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); the Global Earth Observation System of Systems; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and relevant major groups.

6. In its operation, the Working Group will be guided by the relevant procedures established by ECE.
 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. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group's activities.
 9. CEP will review the present terms of reference in two years' time (i.e., in 2016).
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