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Eleventh meeting

Geneva, 15 and 16 February 2016

Report of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development on its eleventh meeting

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	2
A. Attendance	2
B. Organizational matters	2
II. Preparations for the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in 2016	3
A. Organizational issues	3
B. Official documents.....	4
III. Recent activities to promote education for sustainable development	6
A. Capacity-building activities	6
B. Activities to promote education for sustainable development in other international forums...	7
IV. Strengthening synergies with other organizations and processes	8
V. Promoting education for sustainable development beyond 2015: organization of work after the High-level Meeting.....	10
VI. Round table: mainstreaming gender issues in education for sustainable development	11
VII. Status of the trust fund and resource requirements for 2016–2017	11
VIII. Dates for the next session and closure of the meeting	13

I. Introduction

1. The eleventh meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development was held on 15 and 16 February 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland.

A. Attendance

2. Delegations from 27 ECE member States attended the meeting: Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

3. From the United Nations system, representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDP Ukraine, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) participated.

4. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was represented.

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: COPERNICUS Alliance; European ECO Forum; Learning for a Sustainable Future; Mälardalen University (Sweden); NGO “Education, Ecology, Sustainable Development” (Ukraine); NGO “Wave” (Ukraine); Planet’ERE; and the Regional Centre of Expertise on Sustainable Development Kyrgyzstan.

B. Organizational matters

7. The Chair of the Committee, Mr. Gerald Farthing (Canada), opened the meeting.

8. The ECE Executive Secretary welcomed delegates and congratulated them on the accomplishments in over a decade of implementation of the Strategy, as a regional achievement but also an important contribution of the ECE region to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) led by UNESCO. The eleventh meeting would be mainly devoted to preparations for the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries to be held in the framework of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016). The objective of the High-level Meeting was to assess progress during the first 10 years of the Strategy and to consider its future implementation. He hoped that the member States would allocate and mobilize substantial national resources to ensure the continuation, development, consolidation and expansion of education for sustainable development by fostering national and local processes for the implementation of the future framework. The High-level Meeting was particularly important in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and it should build a new momentum for education for sustainable development for the entire region. He thanked the Government of Georgia for the successful preparations of the Ministerial Conference. Georgia had demonstrated strong achievements in the area of education for sustainable development, ensuring links between environmental education and the strong environmental policies being developed over the past decade in Georgia, as well as to international leadership in environmental matters. Inter-agency partnerships between UNESCO, UNEP and ECE also played an important role in advancing the education for sustainable development agenda. Finally, he noted the achievements of the Manitoba

Province in Canada in the realm of education for sustainable development, including its contribution to the successful leadership of the Steering Committee during the past five years.

9. The Committee adopted its agenda (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2016/1),¹ which had been prepared by the secretariat in agreement with the Chair and the Bureau.

II. Preparations for the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in 2016

A. Organizational issues

10. The Chair recalled that, at its twenty-first session (Geneva, 27–30 October 2015), the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy had considered the main organizational issues for the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. It had welcomed progress in preparing the High-level Segment on Education for Sustainable Development, and had invited the secretariat to provide an update on preparations at the Committee's special session (Geneva, 23–25 February 2016).

11. The secretariat reminded the Steering Committee that, at the Committee's tenth meeting (Geneva, 8–9 June 2015), members had been asked to send proposals for the outline of the High-level Segment to the secretariat in writing within the two weeks after that meeting. As no proposals had been received by the deadline, the Bureau in consultation with the secretariat agreed to follow the scenario that had been applied at the previous high-level meeting of education and environment ministers organized in the framework of the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007).

12. The Chair opened the floor for discussion and invited the Committee to decide and agree on the proposed format and content of the High-level Segment (see information paper No. 1) and possibly propose candidates for particular roles at the meeting (e.g., chair, keynote speakers and other interventions).

13. During the discussions, delegates expressed their opinions on the format and the content of the Segment's scenario and made practical proposals with regard to the duration and sequence of interventions, as well as their content.

14. The Chair summarized the discussion and read out the agreed decisions as follows: (a) keynote addresses by ministers of education and environment should focus on progress achieved by the region in implementing the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development over the past decade and future work, following guidance to be developed by the secretariat; (b) to save time, the framework for the future implementation of the Strategy and the Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development would be presented together for consideration and adoption; (c) priority for the interventions from the floor should be given to the ministers of education and environment first and after to other participants, following clear guidance to be developed by the secretariat, including a preliminary list of interventions; (d) at the initiative of Germany and the Netherlands, it would be proposed to the Committee on Environmental Policy that a sentence be introduced in the text of the Ministerial Declaration from the Conference referring to the Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development to ensure that the two processes were interlinked.

¹ All documentation for the eleventh meeting, including presentations that were made available to the secretariat, can be found on a dedicated web page: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41587#/>.

15. The Steering Committee asked the secretariat to update Information Paper No. 1 by introducing the proposed changes to the draft scenario for the High-level Segment on Education for Sustainable Development, and requested that it communicate the Committee's decision on the agreed format and content of the Segment to the Committee on Environmental Policy at its special session.

16. The Chair thanked those member States that had already informed the secretariat regarding the representation of their national Governments at the High-level Segment, and invited other delegations to send the requested information after the present meeting and before the official deadline indicated in the invitation letters (29 February 2016). The letters of invitation to national Governments had been sent out by the Georgian Government through official diplomatic channels before the end of 2015.

B. Official documents

1. Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and ways forward (third evaluation report)

17. Ms. Carolee Buckler, co-author of the third evaluation report "Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and ways forward" (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2016/3), updated the Steering Committee on the report's content and provided a brief summary of the main findings, which had been presented in detail at the tenth meeting of the Steering Committee in June 2015. The report would be presented at the forthcoming High-level Meeting in Batumi for information.

18. The Chair noted that, overall, ECE member States had made good progress during the past decade in implementing the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, but that that progress had not been even across the region with respect to the three priority action areas. Nevertheless, in all geographical areas of the region and in every topic area there were many examples of good work done, with a number of good case studies developed that would be useful to learn from. An example from Manitoba Province in Canada served to illustrate one of the important achievements — i.e., obtaining political support for the implementation of the Strategy, which had been public and evident in Manitoba. Outcomes from phase III of implementation (2011–2015) indicated that it was now essential to move from political leadership and support to concrete and practical action. It was important to continue the work beyond the decade along the three horizontal and three vertical priority action areas outlined in the future implementation framework, which would build on the work that had been done over the past 10 years.

19. In the ensuing discussion, speakers highlighted that it was important not only to build on the work already accomplished, but also to revisit the current understanding of sustainable development and the role of education for sustainable development in terms of promoting sustainable development, particularly in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals to be worked on over the next 15 years. That involved deepening the understanding and further integrating the Sustainable Development Goals and education for sustainable development — a strong message that had to be taken forward to the Batumi Ministerial Conference.

20. It was noted that the two previous evaluation reports had focused mainly on the achievements in formal primary education, and that it would be interesting to provide in the third report a quantitative analysis to show if the balance had changed towards secondary, higher and technical and vocational education and training. The secretariat clarified that at the present stage it was not possible to include additional information and analysis in the report, which had been finalized. It was proposed that such information could be provided in an informal supplementary report.

2. Publication “Ten years of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development”

21. The Chair recalled that an official publication on the achievements of 10 years of implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development had been forecasted for 2015. Given that the progress report on the implementation of phase III had only been finalized for the eleventh Steering Committee meeting, instead of the tenth as originally planned, the Bureau agreed at its meeting in 2015 that the publication should be ready for the Steering Committee meeting in 2016 and should focus on the outcomes of the progress reports from the three implementation phases, as well as the case studies developed based on the national implementation reports.

22. The Chair also reported that, due to the delay in the submission of the publication in 2015, it would not be possible to have it translated into French and Russian. Currently the pre-final draft of the publication was ready and had been uploaded on the meeting’s web page for the Committee’s consideration. The next step would be to submit the final draft for lay out, design and publishing by the Division of Conference Management at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

23. Ms. Buckler, one of the co-authors, briefly presented the publication, *Ten years of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development*. The publication contained a summary of the outcomes of the progress reports from the three implementation phases, including success stories, and also drew on the national implementation reports, which had then been further developed to serve as examples of good practices for the priority action areas.

24. At the request of delegates, the secretariat clarified the difference between the third evaluation report, “Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and ways forward” and the present publication. The first provided a synopsis of the progress of ECE member States in implementing the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2005 to 2015, with particular attention paid to the third and final phase of the Strategy’s implementation (2011–2015) and to opportunities for advancing education for sustainable development into the future. The synopsis was drawn from the full outcomes document, to be issued as a publication. That document included a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data provided by member States, case studies and a more detailed explanation of the methodology and findings.

25. The secretariat stressed that without the help received from the provincial government of Manitoba it would not have been possible to compile the two documents in time for the Committee’s consideration and subsequent presentation to ministers at Batumi.

26. The Chair acknowledged with appreciation the work done by the government of Manitoba in the form of its in-kind contribution to the activities under the Strategy, including compiling the evaluation report and the publication, and highlighted that that work was beneficial also for Canada as it provided a good understanding of the education for sustainable development processes globally, and in particular in the ECE region.

27. The Committee asked the secretariat to facilitate the publishing of the publication in English, preferably in time for the High-level Meeting in Batumi.

3. Draft future implementation framework

28. The Chair informed the Committee that, following the Steering Committee’s request at its tenth meeting, the secretariat in cooperation with the Bureau had revised the current draft of the future implementation framework for the Strategy (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2016/4) in the light of the outcomes of the discussions held at the most recent Bureau meeting and the comments received.

29. The secretariat informed the Committee about a few remaining revisions to be made and proposed the final language.

30. In the following discussions, delegates reflected on the content of the text of the draft future implementation framework and proposed to introduce few additional and final changes.

31. The Steering Committee approved the final text of the draft future implementation framework to be submitted for adoption at the High-level Meeting in Batumi in June 2016.

4. Draft ministerial statement

32. The Chair recalled that a zero draft of the ministerial statement for adoption at the High-level Meeting in 2016 had been reviewed by the Steering Committee at its tenth meeting and commented. The document had then been revised by the secretariat in accordance with the comments received from members both at the meeting and electronically by the end of June 2015. The revised version of the draft ministerial statement (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2016/5) had then been submitted by the secretariat for information to the Committee on Environmental Policy at the twenty-first session, as one of the proposed draft outcomes of the Batumi Conference.

33. The Chair informed the Committee that several additional proposals to the text of the statement had been received lately from member States. He asked the secretariat to project those proposals on a screen for delegates to discuss.

34. The Committee discussed and further amended the text of the statement at the meeting and approved a final text of the draft ministerial statement for submission to the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi for adoption.

III. Recent activities to promote education for sustainable development

A. Capacity-building activities

35. The secretariat updated participants on the planned Swiss-funded capacity-building workshop scheduled to be held before the end of April 2016 in Belarus on the promotion of education for sustainable development in that country. Such capacity-building workshops at the national and subregional levels made an important contribution to promoting coordination between relevant stakeholders, including different governmental departments, in ensuring the Strategy's implementation.

36. The Chair thanked the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation for its crucial support and welcomed the future cooperation. The representative of Switzerland informed the Committee that the Swiss Government intended to continue providing support for the ECE education for sustainable development capacity-building activities in 2017, given the interest expressed by member States from the countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

37. The Chair asked member States to express their interest in organizing a similar workshop in their countries. Interest was expressed by Armenia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as Kosovo.² The Bureau in

² All references to Kosovo in the present document should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

cooperation with the secretariat would consider the candidates and inform them of the possibility of organizing such workshops in the course of 2016.

38. The Committee took note of the information, welcomed the established cooperation with the Belarusian and Swiss Governments, invited member States to contribute further to capacity-building activities and asked the secretariat to continue cooperation with interested member States in that direction.

B. Activities to promote education for sustainable development in other international forums

39. The Steering Committee was updated about recent activities to promote education for sustainable development in other international forums.

40. A representative of the UNESCO Section for Education for Sustainable Development updated participants on the activities implemented in the framework of the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (Global Action Programme), launched at the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, 10–12 November 2014), and gave a brief overview of the planned focus of work for the next two years. UNESCO was the lead United Nations agency for setting the education for sustainable development agenda, as well as seeing that education for sustainable development moved higher up the political agenda and attracted increased international recognition. During recent years education for sustainable development had been included in many documents adopted by all United Nations Member States, as well as by certain groups of Member States, including: the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which set the agenda on education until 2030 to align with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS); Strategic Objective 3 of the Man and the Biosphere Programme Strategy for the period 2015–2025; and article 12 of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Moreover, General Assembly resolution 70/209 on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development had reaffirmed that education for sustainable development was a vital means of implementation for sustainable development, and education for sustainable development was enshrined in Sustainable Development Goals 4 (target 4.7) and 13 (target 13.3).

41. The UNESCO representative further reported on the outcomes of joint activities currently being undertaken by the five Partner Networks established to help implement the Global Action Programme, and informed the Committee about the provisional timeline for the planned activities of members of Partner Networks and flagship projects developed for each priority action area. The secretariat also informed participants about the relevant outcomes of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris, 30 November–11 December 2015).

42. In the ensuing discussion, speakers focused on the importance of providing a better synergy between the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. The National Commissions for UNESCO had to play a crucial role at the national level in order to bring together efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals and implement the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in the framework of advancing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

43. The Chair shared the achievements of Manitoba Province in Canada in implementing the Strategy. Efforts in Manitoba had focused on student competencies, to ensure that students left school with a certain set of competencies that would equip and prepare them for the future, providing them with a maximum knowledge and understanding of sustainable development.

44. In some concluding remarks on the discussion, the Chair observed that sustainable development efforts were at a turning point, which concerned how the different efforts and initiatives undertaken by different groups and organizations were linked, and how they could be better integrated and better aligned. All those efforts lead back to education, which could serve as a link and a unifying force. Education had the central role in the development of sustainable development initiatives and figuring out what needed to be done, as reflected in various political documents. Given the sometimes overwhelming difficulties facing the world, it was extremely encouraging that education could provide hope for a collective future.

IV. Strengthening synergies with other organizations and processes

45. A number of stakeholders informed the Steering Committee of national and international activities related to the Strategy's implementation that were planned or were currently being carried out.

46. The representative of Belarus briefed the Committee about the content of the third Environmental Performance Review recently undertaken in the country in cooperation with UNECE experts, which included an overview of the existing national policies related to education for sustainable development and institutions responsible for the implementation of those policies. The Interagency Coordinating Council on Education for Sustainable Development, established in 2006 and reorganized in June 2015 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, was mandated to coordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the third review related to the environmental education and education for sustainable development, including the amendment of its regulations.

47. A representative of the Canadian non-profit organization, Learning for a Sustainable Future, briefed delegates about the work of the organization, focusing on the key challenges and opportunities in developing an education for sustainable development strategy in Canada over the next few years, the role of Learning for a Sustainable Future in support of education for sustainable development and the work it had done previously in the area, as well as some of the implications for the future direction of the ECE Steering Committee for Education for Sustainable Development — in particular how all education for sustainable development actors could continue to work effectively together during the next 15-year period.

48. The representative of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute reported on the efforts of Cyprus to promote education for sustainable development on the national and international levels since the Steering Committee's tenth meeting, and outlined recent concrete examples of synergies with other organizations and processes and the achievements from the implementation of different projects and programmes in cooperation with multiple stakeholders. Three projects had been successfully implemented at the national level. At the international level, among examples of synergies being exploited were cooperation with a network of Mediterranean and other European universities, participation in an environmental network of experts, "Environment and School Initiatives", and bilateral cooperation with Austria. Cyprus would be hosting a High-level Meeting on Education to adopt an Action Plan for the Mediterranean Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development based on the UNECE Strategy. All the Ministers of Education from the Mediterranean region and the European Union member countries, as well as a number of international organizations, would be invited.

49. A representative of the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary spoke about the participation of Hungary in the international project "Sustainability Science in Central and Eastern Europe" initiated by the UNESCO National Commissions of Austria, Germany, Poland and Slovakia. Participants in the project included ministries, academies of science,

universities and National Commissions for UNESCO of Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The project aimed to build a network of sustainability science institutions in the region, developing requirement profiles for funding research agencies, researchers and policymakers, as well as developing qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate the performance within the Central Eastern European region as a whole, and at the same time to evaluate the performance individually at national level.

50. The representative of Mälardalen University (Sweden) presented the Environmental and Sustainability Education Research network, established in 2014 in the framework of the European Educational Research Association, which was made up of more than 30 national and regional educational research associations from all parts of Europe. The Environmental and Sustainability Education Research network was the largest network of researchers on environment and sustainability education, embracing more than 200 researchers from 32 countries worldwide. Approximately 100 researchers met annually within the European Conference on Educational Research, which was usually held in one of the European countries. The network offered high-quality research standards and various forms of network sessions, such as symposiums, paper sessions, poster sessions, workshops, etc., focused on the research in the theory and practice of environmental and sustainability education, environmental education, education for sustainable development, global education, outdoor education and socio-scientific issues in science education, as well as research in educational policy, institutional and curriculum development, pedagogical practice, professional development and learner empowerment. ECE member States were invited to participate in the network so as to enhance the links between policy and research and to benefit from its competence in the area.

51. A UNDP Ukraine representative briefed participants on four selected projects aimed at promoting knowledge about sustainable development and education for sustainable development. The speaker outlined activities undertaken under the projects, as well as the outcomes of implementation and the benefits received. A representative of the national Intersectoral Coordination Centre for Environmental Education for Sustainable Development reported on the plans and activities of the Centre, which had been established by the State Ecological Academy of Postgraduate Education and Management of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine in accordance with the National Action Plan for Environmental Protection for 2011–2015. The main purpose of the Centre was to provide training, methodological and informational support for putting in place and implementing education for sustainable development in the country.

52. The representative of the COPERNICUS Alliance, a network of higher education institutions, spoke about the *Leading Practice Publication: Professional development of university educators on education for sustainable development in European countries*, as an outcome of the European project “University Educators for Sustainable Development”. The publication was the result of implementation of the project’s second stage, which involved the mapping of the field of education for sustainable development in higher education, with a special emphasis on the framework of competences developed by the ECE working group. The publication provided an overview of 13 selected best practice examples of professional development opportunities for European university educators in the area of education for sustainable development, built upon a partnership of 55 partners from 33 European countries. It also reviewed possibilities for implementing education for sustainable development for professional development at the level of higher education throughout Europe and provided information on the ways in which relevant professional development in education for sustainable development could be acquired, as well as what was needed at the policy level to reach that transformation. The project would be finalized and evaluated at a conference to be held from 27 to 29 June 2016 at the University of Gibraltar. Delegates were invited to

participate in the COPERNICUS Alliance conference to be held from 14 to 16 September 2016 in Vienna on the topic of “Sustainability Transformation of Science”.

53. During the discussions, it was proposed that the Steering Committee undertake research on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7 by collecting relevant studies on the practice of education for sustainable development at different levels of the educational system and preparing analytical policy briefs. A representative of the Environmental and Sustainability Education Research network said that the network could assist in that task.

54. A representative of the ECE Sustainable Transport Division shared experience concerning the joint project with the ECE Trade Division, “Education on Standardization”. The project sought to promote awareness among university students majoring in economics, law and management of the importance of standards in a globalized economy and trade. It was suggested that, in order to promote sustainability issues, it would be useful to prepare a learning module on sustainable standards to be used as a self-standing training tool or as a part of ECE standardization activities (for example, under the “Education on Standardization” project). The Steering Committee took note of the proposal.

V. Promoting education for sustainable development beyond 2015: organization of work after the High-level Meeting

55. The Chair recalled that the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development had been implemented according to the detailed workplans developed for each of the first three phases of its implementation. Now the Steering Committee had to think about the development of a new workplan for the Strategy beyond the first decade of its implementation, and also beyond the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

56. The secretariat presented an overview of the workplans developed for the first three implementation phases. The latest workplan had been adopted in 2011 at the sixth meeting of the Steering Committee. Its content was largely derived from the general document for the Strategy’s implementation — the Vilnius Framework for Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (CEP/AC.13/2005/4/Rev.1). Similarly, a new workplan had to be based on the new framework for the implementation of the Strategy, which would be submitted to the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi for adoption. As the formal mandate to continue the work under the Strategy — and therefore to develop next workplan — would come from the High-level Meeting, the Committee could not yet start to develop a new workplan.

57. The Chair recalled the Committee’s decision that the new mandate for the implementation of the Strategy would run up to 2030 and that the timeline for activities and reporting under the Strategy would be aligned with the UNESCO reporting framework. At its last meeting, the Bureau had considered the possibility of creating two ad hoc groups — one to address the issue of funding and another to draft a new workplan. Finally the Bureau had suggested establishing one ad hoc group to work on both issues to avoid a situation in which one group proposed actions for which there was no funding.

58. Following the proposal of the Bureau, the Steering Committee agreed to establish an Ad Hoc Task Force on Planning and Finance to work on the two issues of drafting a new workplan and reviewing the financial situation of the trust fund for its implementation. It was decided that the group would hold the first meeting over lunchtime of the current session to decide on its tasks and responsibilities.

VI. Round table: mainstreaming gender issues in education for sustainable development

59. The Chair recalled that, following a decision taken at its tenth meeting, the Steering Committee had agreed to organize a round table at its eleventh meeting to share experiences and achievements in the area of mainstreaming gender issues in the education sector in general and specifically in education for sustainable development.

60. The secretariat presented a brief summary of the inputs provided by the member States in the framework of reporting under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality (Information paper No. 2), and invited the members to share their experiences and achievements in the area of mainstreaming gender issues in the education sector.

61. The representative of the Czech Republic informed participants about the two case studies provided by NGOs regarding the overall situation in the country in terms of gender equity in general and in the education sector in particular. One of the NGOs working with civil society had implemented a programme on enforcing gender equity and published educational materials aimed, among others, at providing teachers with an understanding of a gender perspective in education. Other NGO activities had been aimed mainly at raising public awareness on global issues of concern, including gender in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and education for the twenty-first century.

62. The representative of Kyrgyzstan presented the outcomes of the project “Gender sensitivity to democratic values of rural population of Issyk-Kul oblast through education for sustainable development principles”, implemented in 2012 by the Regional Centre of Expertise on Sustainable Development. The project aimed at forming a critical mass of gender-sensitive men and women to introduce the core topics of education for sustainable development in small and medium-sized businesses, government and education at the local community level. Project activities had focused on improving the capacity of local communities in the sphere of democratic values, gender sensitivity for equal participation of men and women in the decision-making process and ensuring sustainable development through improving the quality of life of the rural population.

63. The representative of Ukraine talked about best practices and success stories in mainstreaming gender issues in education for sustainable development drawn from the projects implemented in the country by the Partnership Network “Education for Sustainable Development”, the civil society organization network “Zelena Zhytomyrshchyna” and the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme, in cooperation with a wide range of national organizations and international partners. The overall aim of the projects was to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, contributing to raising awareness of civil society on its participation in policymaking processes, strategy development, action plans and the development of practical instruments for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development on the national and local levels in Ukraine.

VII. Status of the trust fund and resource requirements for 2016–2017

64. The secretariat informed the Committee that at present it was not possible to give a comprehensive overview of the operations of the education for sustainable development trust fund for the period 2014–2015. That was because, since November 2015, the entire United Nations system, including ECE, had been in the process of transition to a new system of accounting and administrative support —“Umoja”. Unfortunately, the recent report generated manually by the finance unit of the ECE Executive Office did not provide the

secretariat with enough details to give a general overview of the trust fund's status. Draft information on contributions would be disseminated to members upon request so that they could check for any inconsistencies.

65. The secretariat stressed that the status of the trust fund remained critical and that it would most likely be difficult to ensure the servicing of the Strategy's activities between the eleventh Steering Committee meeting and the High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries in 2016 and beyond. A sound financial basis grounded on a realistic approach was needed for an effective implementation of the future Strategy.

66. Representatives of several member States made pledges on behalf of their Governments for the delivery of additional financial contributions soon, which should contribute to covering the costs of secretariat support up to the Batumi Ministerial Conference.

67. The representative of Canada mentioned that all contributions from Canada so far had come from local governments. The possibility of future contributions coming from the federal Government would be explored.

68. Another proposal to consider for the future was the possibility for member States to provide in-kind project-specific contributions in support to some of the activities for the implementation of the Strategy. For example, in the past Germany had supported the Strategy through the secondment of a Junior Professional Officer, and the provincial government of Manitoba had provided an in-kind contribution for the preparation of the third evaluation report and the related publication.

69. The representative of the Netherlands confirmed the Dutch Government's readiness to provide in-kind contributions to the implementation of the Strategy's activities connected with the content-related substantial work, such as covering the costs of organizing a meeting of an expert group working on a substantive issue, including the publication of related materials, as it had done in the past.

70. In the following discussion, it was suggested to create a separate trust fund for education for sustainable development — meaning that all contributions would be placed in a separately labelled "education for sustainable development" fund and not lumped in with contributions to the Environment for Europe process. Following a unanimous and strong recommendation of the Steering Committee, the secretariat was mandated to request the ECE Executive Office that a new accounting procedure be created for a separate education for sustainable development fund.

71. The secretariat was also requested to send out letters to Governments of member States (education and environment ministries) asking for financial contributions in support of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. In the letter, member States would be asked to make commitments in particular with regard to funding the preparations for the High-level Meeting in Batumi and the activities of the Strategy in 2016 after the meeting, setting out also the relevant decisions of the Steering Committee in that regard. The financial contribution letters addressed to ministers would also be copied to the national education for sustainable development focal points for their follow-up.

72. Regarding the Ad Hoc Task Force on Planning and Finance, the Committee noted that all Committee members, as national focal points, were eligible to become Task Force members, but that representatives of observer organizations were also eligible. Membership in the Task Force also did not necessarily imply an obligation to provide further funding to the Steering Committee's trust fund. During the meeting four members volunteered to join the group. The Committee elected a representative of the observer organization from Canada as interim Chair of the Task Force pending election of a national focal point representing a member Government.

73. The interim Chair of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Planning and Finance summarized the outcomes of the first meeting held during the lunch break. The two interconnected objectives of the Task Force were to prepare a workplan that was feasible within the resources available and to review and strengthen the trust fund in order to support the continued work of the Steering Committee. The Task Force would begin its work by exploring ideas about what specific actions to take in relation to the priority areas already in place, trying to connect those priorities to the developments at the global and international scale, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development. The Task Force would prepare a matrix analysis to show the areas of synergy and overlap, and prioritize three or four of them. The Task Force expected to elaborate a preliminary outline of the workplan, in terms of identifying the top three or four priorities, within a month's time. The second part of the workplan would be to consider what specific actions to take to address those priorities.

VIII. Dates for the next session, election of future officers and closure of the meeting

74. The secretariat pointed out that as the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference would be held in June 2016, it would be advisable to hold the next Steering Committee meeting in the beginning of 2017, taking into consideration that it would be necessary to respect the existing deadline of six months for making an official request for the submission of official documents.

75. The Committee agreed to schedule the twelfth Steering Committee meeting for the end of April 2017. It asked the secretariat to arrange the exact dates with the United Nations Conference Services and to communicate the agreed timing to the Steering Committee by e-mail as soon as the information was available.

76. The Chair reminded the Committee that after the Batumi Conference, at its twelfth meeting, the Steering Committee would have to elect its officers for the next period. In that regard, he might soon be leaving his position of Deputy Minister in the government of Manitoba and would consequently step down as Chair of the Steering Committee, a post he had occupied since 2011. He encouraged member States to communicate any nominations for chair or vice-chair of the Steering Committee to the secretariat.

77. The secretariat proposed a deadline of 8 April 2016 for the nominations. A teleconference call of Bureau members would be scheduled to review the nominations and a recommendation would be sent from the Bureau to members for approval. The new chair and vice-chair would take up their positions after the Batumi meeting. It was clarified that formally election of the new officers, including the chair and vice-chair, would happen at the next meeting of the Steering Committee in 2017 (i.e., the twelfth meeting). It was hoped that the Chair of the Steering Committee would be present at the Batumi Conference in his present capacity.

78. The Chair provided some concluding remarks on the two days of the meeting and thanked the speakers and the Committee for its constructive and efficient work. He also thanked the interpreters for the excellent job and officially closed the meeting.