

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

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

Seventh meeting

Geneva, 1 and 2 March 2012

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Progress achieved in creating synergies with the international sustainable development process and future activities

Promoting education for sustainable development in the international sustainable development process in 2012

Note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. Phase III of the UNECE¹ Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development aims to create and strengthen synergies and links between the Strategy and other relevant processes. In 2011 and 2012, a focus is being put on promoting education for sustainable development (ESD) in the framework of the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), which will take place from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. To this end, a side event was hosted during the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) and a round-table discussion was held at the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Rio+20 Conference (Geneva, 1–2 December 2011). The results of these activities are presented in the report on progress achieved in creating synergies with the international sustainable development process (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2012/5).

2. This document provides a brief update on how ESD is currently represented in the zero draft of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference. It aims to be a basis for discussions at the seventh meeting of the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development on how ESD is currently represented in the zero draft. Member States are invited to share their views on what should be addressed with regard to ESD in the continuing negotiations of the zero draft.

3. As a discussion starter, the document points out possible issues to be addressed, and presents recommendations made by the Inter-Agency Committee² on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

¹ The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) is sometimes abbreviated as UNECE to avoid confusion with other regional mechanisms.

² The Committee includes representatives from a range of United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations University, the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS, the

II. Education for sustainable development in the zero draft of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference

4. The zero draft of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference was released in January 2012. It explicitly refers to ESD in chapter five: “Framework for action and follow-up” under the subheading “education”:

We recognize that access by all people to quality education is an essential condition for sustainable development and social inclusion. We commit to strengthening the contribution of our education systems to the pursuit of sustainable development, including through enhanced teacher training and curricula development.

We call upon universities to become models of best practice and transformation by setting an example of sustainability of facilities on their campuses and teaching sustainable development as a module across all disciplines. In this way sustainable practices will become embedded in learning and action.

We encourage international education exchange activities on education for sustainable development, including the creation of fellowships and scholarships for international study in disciplines and interdisciplinary fields pertinent to the promotion of sustainable development.

We agree to promote education for sustainable development beyond the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2014, to educate a new generation of students in the values, key disciplines and holistic, cross-disciplinary approaches essential to promoting sustainable development.³

III. Issues for discussion and recommendations by the Inter-Agency Committee on the zero draft of the outcome document for Rio+20

5. The zero draft, which explicitly mentions the importance of ESD for achieving sustainable development and recognizes the outstanding importance of teacher competences, moreover calls for the promotion of ESD beyond the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development.

6. In addition, the Steering Committee might find it valuable to address the following issues when discussing the zero draft:

(a) The focus of the zero draft on formal education, in particular on higher education;

(b) The presentation of ESD as a stand-alone topic versus presenting it a cross-sectoral theme;

(c) The absence of a reference to the role of ESD in the transition process to a green economy, taking into account the outcomes of previous panel discussions hosted by the Steering Committee on green skills development, as well as on the role of ESD in transitioning to green societies and economies.

World Food Programme and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, as well as the World Bank.

⁴ The Future We Want — Zero draft of the outcome document, paras. 98 to 101. The document is available online from <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=12&nr=324&menu=23>.

7. In addition, the following recommendations by the Inter-Agency Committee to the zero draft could provide valuable input to the discussions at the seventh Steering Committee meeting:

(a) Mainstream the integration of ESD by all countries' education sectors with a strengthened focus on key sustainable development issues (such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk preparedness, sustainable consumption and production, gender equality, equity and tolerance), skills for resilience and dealing with complexity, innovation, creativity as well as participation and cooperation;

(b) Reinforce support for and facilitation of cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder ESD initiatives at all levels (in particular at the subnational level), as a means not only to develop locally relevant learning systems, but also as a mechanism to upscale and mainstream sustainable practices;

(c) Focus on vulnerable populations, including youth, rural and urban poor, migrant workers, immigrants and marginalized minorities, and their learning needs through formal, non-formal and informal education throughout their lives, and on strengthening their abilities for life and their capacity to succeed and to break the cycle of poverty, hunger and illiteracy;

(d) Further develop ESD initiatives beyond the 2015 target of the Millennium Development Goals by mobilizing capacities and resources of all the relevant governmental agencies, in particular ministries of education as key actors.⁴

8. In addition to the importance of ESD for developing knowledge and skills, when it comes to its role in the transition process to a green economy, ESD should be recognized for its contribution to an interactive and integrated policymaking and decision-making process, based on a wide participatory approach and accountability in accordance with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

III. Expected outcomes

9. It is proposed that the outcomes of the discussion at the Steering Committee meeting on the current representation of ESD in the zero draft of the outcome document of Rio+20 are summarized and circulated to the Steering Committee members by the secretariat in the form of an information note so as to provide the Member States with additional up-to-date information as regards the inclusion of ESD in the zero draft.

⁴ The input of the Inter-Agency Committee can be access online from <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&type=510&nr=322&menu=115>.