



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
22 December 2011

Original: English

---

## 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**

### **Progress achieved in creating synergies with the international sustainable development process**

#### **Note by the secretariat**

## **I. Background**

1. Phase III of the UNECE<sup>1</sup> Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development aims to create and strengthen synergies and links between the Strategy and other relevant processes. To this end, at its sixth meeting, the Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development mandated the secretariat to host a side event during the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011), as well as a round-table discussion at the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference) (Geneva, 1–2 December 2011). This document presents the results of these activities.

---

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

## **II. Side event on greening the economy: the role of education for sustainable development in technical education and vocational training**

2. In its efforts to promote education for sustainable development (ESD) and to link the Strategy to other sustainable development processes, the Strategy for ESD hosted a panel discussion in conjunction with the Astana Ministerial Conference on “greening the economy: ESD and the role of vocational education” on 22 September 2011. In addition to the panel discussion, the Chair of the Steering Committee made a keynote speech at the Conference’s plenary session, drawing the attention of participants to the vital role ESD would need to play to successfully green the economy. Among the panellists in the side event were the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on ESD, as well as representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

3. The Chair of the ECE Steering Committee opened the side event, stressing that greening the economy meant to master an immense economic transformation, maybe the greatest after the industrial revolution. To meet the level of expertise and innovation that was needed for such far-reaching change, not only large-scale job training but also retraining efforts would have to be undertaken. Every job would have to contribute to making the economy more sustainable in the future. In particular, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) had a vital role to play in developing green skills. Skills required in a green economy would include technical skills but also knowledge, values and attitudes vital to promoting sustainable outcomes in industry and the community.

4. The Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee gave an overview of good practices for advancing green economy through ESD in Central Asia. Case studies included: (a) a pilot project to introduce ESD and the subject of energy efficiency into technical colleges; (b) the “green economy for economists of the future” programme, which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Bishkek had just launched and which aimed at developing and introducing an educational module on green economy into the curricula of Kyrgyz higher education institutions; (c) the “Green Pack for Central Asia”, i.e., a CD-ROM providing educational materials on 25 ESD-related themes, which dealt with green economy in an integrated manner; and (d) a training programme for Government officials that had been implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on sustainable development and ESD. The Vice-Chair stressed that, in order to master the transition to a green economy, the provision of green skills in various areas — such as transport, construction, tourism, production of goods and energy — was of the utmost importance. Moreover, competences such as flexibility, creativity, mobility, critical thinking, innovatory and analytical thinking were also critical for the transition.

5. A representative of ILO presented the findings of the 2011 study, “Skills for Green Jobs: A global view”.<sup>2</sup> According to the study, greening the economy would change the labour markets and skill needs in three ways: a structural change that would affect employment within and across sectors; the emergence of entirely new occupations; and the greening of existing jobs. The timely and adequate supply of green skills would boost productivity, employment growth and development and would be indispensable for a successful transformation. On a practical level, there was a need to adapt existing TVET courses to include green technologies. On a policy level, educational policies should capture responses to real industry needs and should ensure the involvement of the

---

<sup>2</sup> ILO and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Geneva, Switzerland). Available from [http://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS\\_115959/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS_115959/lang--en/index.htm).

concerned social partners. Moreover, there should be a link to actions and finance to avoid a lack of enforcement, and there should be a monitoring and coordination mechanism. Finally, engaging youth was a key driver of pro-environmental change for the future; environmental awareness needed to become one of the core competences delivered from early childhood.

6. The Head of the Division for Modern Media and Development of Vocational Training Curricula of GIZ talked about the implementation levels of ESD in TVET. On the macro level, the focus was put on the TVET system itself, on occupations and training regulations. The implementation of ESD on the macro level would entail the integration of ESD in all training regulations, setting the main focus on relevant occupational groups and providing additional qualifications on the advanced training level. Moreover, the development of further specific, environmental technology occupations would be necessary, e.g., in the field of environmental engineering. Implementation on the meso level would cover training centres and companies. Implementing ESD on the meso level included the promotion of sustainable equipment in training institutions, environmental management systems, sustainable organizational development, training of teachers and instructors and integration of environmental-relevant competences in vocational training courses. Finally, the micro level targeted mainly training courses. This, for example, included ensuring the use of tested concepts for environmental training of teachers, instructors and examiners and the provision of relevant and adequate didactic material, as well as the collection and availability of good practices.

7. In the ensuing discussion, participants highlighted that in order to better adapt to the needs of a green economy the dialogue between those developing education systems and training standards and both employers and trade unions needed to be improved. Public-private partnerships were a particularly valuable approach to closely link public TVET institutions and businesses. Moreover, the need to carry out green skills needs assessments at the national level was spotlighted. Finally it was stressed that, in order to motivate people to invest in green skills, more evidence was needed that choosing a “green collar” job” or acquiring green skills would indeed pay off.

8. The message of the Steering Committee for ESD, that education in general, and ESD in particular, has an important role to play in achieving sustainability and green economies resonated with the main plenary and the conference roundtable discussions on greening the economy. The co-Chairs’ summary of the Astana Conference (E/ECE/RPM/2011/2/Add.1) highlights that participants stressed the need for technical and vocational training to transition to a green, entrepreneurial and sustainable economy. In that respect, they identified several concrete steps to prioritize such a transition, including teaching students about the importance of moving to a green economy and making them ecologically literate; understanding the needs of industry to transition to the green economy; and ensuring that policymakers’ support for educators was sufficient to enable them to provide the requisite training for new skills. Moreover, it was noted that the transition to a green economy should engage stakeholders, including consumers and businesses, to become more sustainable through education for sustainable development.

### **III. Round-table discussion on the role of education for sustainable development for achieving sustainability and green economies**

9. During the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20, the Strategy for ESD hosted a round-table discussion on the role of ESD for achieving sustainability and green economies. The discussion was chaired by Mr. Paolo Soprano, a Bureau Member of the

UNECE Strategy for ESD, Vice-Chair of the Bureau for the Preparatory Process of Rio+20, and the Director of the Sustainable Development Division at the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea of Italy. The multi-stakeholder round table included 35 participants, among them country representatives, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Regional Environmental Centres.

10. The Chair opened the round-table discussion, stressing that, since 2000, Governments and main stakeholders had made strong efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals. However, at present, the goal of universal primary education, for example, still proved to be a challenge. In that context, the Rio+20 outcomes should ensure and strengthen continuity with previous international commitments. The Rio+20 process provided an opportunity to promote a new sustainable thinking that was of the utmost importance in the transition towards a green economy.

11. The Chair furthermore highlighted that present sustainable development challenges were becoming increasingly complex and answers to tackle such challenges required a similarly complex approach. It was not about simplifying concepts, but rather about strengthening instruments — for example enhancing the role of ESD as an appropriate means of implementing sustainable development, as it provided the necessary holistic and interdisciplinary approach.

12. The first keynote speaker, the former Deputy State Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Science of Sweden, stressed that ESD, i.e., education that strove to strengthen sustainable development in three dimensions — economic, social and environmental — also presented a good prospect for contributing to poverty eradication. ESD had to gain a prominent position on the agenda at Rio+20 so that the importance of education in achieving the Conference's objectives was clearly emphasized. Indeed, the education sector was often the biggest and most important sector in countries. Therefore, ESD ought to be not only “a” key means but “the” key means in endeavours for a green economy and sustainable development.

13. The task of ECE in promoting ESD was more important than ever before at Rio+20, the first keynote speaker said. No other organization, except the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was in a position to do that as credibly as ECE, bearing in mind the successful of its work to promote ESD. At Rio+20, the Member States of the United Nations had to be given the main responsibility for the follow-up activities of the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). There had to be a strong call made for Governments to adopt national action plans for promoting ESD, built upon the founding principles of the Bonn Declaration and the UNECE Strategy on ESD. Moreover, in a resolution adopted at the thirty-sixth session of the UNESCO General Conference, the UNESCO Director-General had been requested “to develop options for transforming the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development into an institutionalized process beyond 2014”.

14. The second keynote speaker, a representative of the UNESCO DESD secretariat, highlighted that the DESD was an important vehicle for empowering people of all ages to engage in creating a sustainable future, and for promoting development which was socially desirable, culturally harmonious, economically viable and ecologically sustainable. Education towards green societies had to be seen as a comprehensive package for quality education and learning within which key issues such as poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, climate change, gender equality, corporate social responsibility and protection of indigenous cultures were incorporated.

15. ESD sought to enable citizens to face the challenges of the present and future, and to enlighten leaders so that they could to make relevant decisions for a viable world, the UNESCO DESD representative said. Education towards green societies was basically about

teaching and learning approaches that promoted skills such as critical thinking, self-reflection, personal decision-making and problem-solving, multi-disciplinary thinking and reflecting on values and ethics. Thus, ESD and education towards green societies needed to be seen as a strategy to enable individuals to take informed and responsible decisions and actions, now and in the future.

16. In the following round-table discussion, more than 30 stakeholders engaged in discussing vital issues for promoting ESD in the Rio+20 process. It was stressed that education was crucial for achieving sustainable development. In that connection, it was observed that in many countries even primary education — let alone quality education — was not yet a reality. In Rio, countries needed to renew their commitment to education in order to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. Education should be understood as one of the most powerful determinations of broader “macro behaviours”: for instance, there was ample evidence that child survival was directly linked to the educational level of the mother.

17. Participants also highlighted that ESD was an important means to facilitate the transition to a green economy. Greening the economy meant to fundamentally rethink the current economy and ESD could be a lens through which to define such a new, green economy. ESD also had the ability to convey knowledge, skills, competences and values for sustainability. In that regard, it should address the question of what greening the economy meant and could be a vital communication and persuasion tool for making the economy green.

18. In the context of the ESD contribution to greening the economy, the development of a 10-year framework of programmes through the Marrakech Process for education for sustainable consumption was crucial, and it had to continue to be an important part of ESD also after Rio+20. ESD also needed to address the demand for green skills, in particular in TVET, and themes related to greening the economy should be introduced into all education systems. Moreover, ESD should include specific sectoral approaches (such as resource efficiency, biodiversity, etc). A valuable set of teaching materials that could be used to that end was the Regional Environmental Centres “Green Pack” educational kit.

19. Challenges and opportunities in promoting ESD now and beyond 2015 were also highlighted. It was noted that in some countries there was a great lack of political will to support education in general, as well as the implementation of ESD in particular. The support of international organizations and NGOs was therefore crucial to improve education in those countries and to promote the implementation of ESD now and in the future. National action plans and strategies for ESD were recognized as central to successfully implementing ESD, and guidance for such plans was provided by the UNECE Strategy for ESD and by UNESCO. Communities were also important partners in implementing ESD. In that connection, the multilateral CoDeS Network had recently been launched, funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme from the European Union. It focused on school community collaboration addressing sustainability.

20. A participant observed that, to successfully implement ESD, policymakers needed to be trained in sustainable development, as was done, for instance, in Croatia. Finally, it was stressed that there was a need to assess and monitor the outcomes of ESD implementation, and to begin to discuss the follow-up to the DESD now — there should not only be a Decade on ESD, but a century on ESD.

21. The ideas developed and presented in the round table resonated with the wider participants of the Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20. During the main plenary session, but also during the parallel round-table discussions that were held during the run of the meeting, country representatives as well as representatives of NGOs and international organizations raised the importance of education in general and ESD in particular. The

co-Chair's summary of the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting emphasizes that "a number of delegations highlighted the importance of ... the ECE and ... UNESCO work on education for sustainable development". With regard to achieving a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, the summary underlines that "education for sustainable development was important in many dimensions, including improving consumer choice, equipping decision makers with adequate information and increasing political will in the promotion of green economy." Finally "member States and stakeholders had stressed crosscutting issues, including sustainable consumption and production, gender mainstreaming, education, science and technology". (E/ECE/RPM/2011/2/Add.1).

---