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Implementing the third phase of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development: progress achieved in promoting educator competences for education for sustainable development

Report on progress made by the Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development

Report by the Chair of the Expert Group

I. Introduction

1. At its sixth meeting, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development adopted the Learning for the Future report,¹ drafted by the Expert Group on Competences in Education for Sustainable Development. The report sets out general recommendations for policymakers, as well as a range of core competences in education for sustainable development (ESD) for educators (the Competences).² Also at its sixth session, the Steering Committee mandated the Expert Group to consider national practices and experiences concerning the adaptation of the Competences to local contexts (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/2, para. 34). At its seventh meeting, the Steering Committee further mandated the Expert Group to work on a resource for workshops on the adaptation of the Competences at the subregional and national levels (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2012/2, paras. 40–45).

¹ Learning for the Future: Competences in Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6).

² Ibid., sect. III.

2. With a view to fulfilling the above mandates, the Netherlands hosted the sixth meeting of the Expert Group from 26 to 28 March 2012 in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

3. Experts from the following countries participated in the Expert Group's sixth meeting: Canada, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Sweden and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Participating organizations included the Central Asian Working Group on Education for Sustainable Development, the European ECO Forum and the United Nations University.

II. National practices and experiences concerning the adaptation of the Competences

4. The first session of the Expert Group meeting focused on considering experiences gained in 2011 and 2012 with regard to the adaptation of the Competences to local contexts. Presenting an overview of experiences gained in the region in 2012, the ECE secretariat for ESD noted that the Learning for the Future report had been well received in many countries when it was released. It had been translated into a number of different languages, had become a point of reference for discussions on initial teacher education and on teacher accreditation, and had provided the basis for international workshops and training events with policymakers and ESD advocates.

5. The Expert Group also considered two case studies of implementation of the Competences: one from the Netherlands and one from Canada.

6. The Dutch focal point for ESD presented experiences with adapting the Competences to the national context. The Dutch programme had shifted from "learning for sustainable development" to "social innovation for a green economy". Recalling that the Expert Group had proposed that the Competences be translated not just into national/local languages, but into words and examples that made sense in local circumstances, the Dutch experience had shown that that was both appropriate and necessary. Hence, the Dutch Government had translated the document into Dutch and had developed a more user-friendly layout. The adapted document focused on an open mind, active insight and active citizenship. In the Netherlands importance was also allocated to promoting networks among the relevant stakeholders and sectors.

7. The representative of Canada presented experiences made with localizing the Competences in Canada. There were 13 different provinces and territories in Canada and each had autonomy in the education sector. It was therefore difficult to provide a comprehensive summary of activities carried out all over the country. It was highlighted that the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada played a leadership role in education, serving as a platform for addressing policy issues and as an instrument for implementing projects of mutual interest. Other relevant experiences in Canada that were spotlighted included the role of learning for a sustainable future and activities undertaken by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education, the Regional Centre of Expertise on ESD and the Manitoba Education system. Moreover, a major conference of the International Network of Teacher Education Institutions would be held at York University in Toronto in 2012. The objectives of the Conference were to discuss progress in ESD, share good practices and develop recommendations for activities to be realized after the United Nations Decade on ESD came to an end in 2014.

III. Empowering educators for a sustainable future: tools for policy and practice workshops

8. Following the mandate provided by the Steering Committee, the Expert Group dedicated its second session to the development of a tool-kit to facilitate subregional workshops on competences in ESD. According to the discussions held at the Steering Committee meeting, it was concluded that the tool-kit should focus on workshops to be held at the subregional level. However, it was also underlined that it should be generic enough so that other key target groups could also use it.

9. Teacher educators, education leaders, ministry officials, non-governmental organizations, tertiary education personnel and representatives from various economic sectors, were identified as potential workshop participants.

10. It was further discussed that the focus of the tool-kit should be on supporting those who organized and facilitated the workshops. The overall aims of such participatory workshops would be: (a) to enable participants to become aware of the Competences; (b) to enable participants to analyse barriers and drivers to implementing the Competences and recommendations; and (c) to share good practices.

11. The Expert Group was supported in its deliberations by a case study of an international workshop addressing sustainability issues, which was presented by the Netherlands. The workshop had been designed to train policymakers on sustainability issues. One of the activities used in that workshop included analysing the Competences, as well as discussing to what extent they had been implemented.

12. The Expert Group further developed an outline of tool-kit contents, which included (a) a description of the change process of which the workshops were a part; (b) a description of the generic principles underlying the workshops; (c) a description of the methods for the workshops (i.e., they might include different modules, core and optional); (d) templates and suggestions for workshop modules; and (e) a list of resources that could be drawn upon by workshop facilitators.

13. For the remainder of the meeting, the Expert Group worked on developing modules and compiling them into a coherent tool-kit. The resource was organized into two sections: (a) Competences workshops in the change process; and (b) a suggested workshop format and activities.

14. Following the Expert Group meeting, the Chair and the secretariat held a follow-up meeting to compile and edit the tool-kit, which would be made available as an official document for the eighth Steering Committee meeting (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2013/3).

15. In the final discussion of the Expert Group meeting, the focal point of the Netherlands generously proposed that the Netherlands would be willing to also finance the lay-out of the English language version of the Competences document. Moreover, the Dutch focal points mentioned that there might also be a possibility to lay out and electronically publish the workshop tool-kit.

16. The secretariat informed the Expert Group that a subregional workshop would be held in Central Asia in June 2012, which would provide an opportunity to pilot some of the newly developed workshop modules.