Panel Discussion at the Sixth Steering Committee meeting: “Taking Stock and Looking Forward – ESD in the context of Rio+20”

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In 2012 the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or 'Rio+20' will take place in Rio de Janeiro. Also referred to as the Rio+20 Earth Summit, the objectives of the Summit are to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development; to assess progress towards internationally agreed goals on sustainable development and to address new and emerging challenges. In particular Rio+20 will focus on two specific themes: a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and an institutional framework for sustainable development.

2. On the regional level, the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its sixteenth session decided that “greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development” as well as “sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems” would be the main themes at the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in Astana.

3. Following the recommendations of the Bureau, a panel discussion at the sixth Steering Committee Meeting for ESD will discuss the role of ESD for greening the economy, with a view to identifying interlinkages and creating synergies with the on-going international processes on sustainable development.

Format

4. A multi-stakeholder panel discussion of 2.5 hours will be held at the sixth Steering Committee meeting. The panel will be composed of 3 panellists representing various stakeholders of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. The three panellists will introduce three
central topics for greening the economy – green skills, sustainable consumption and green thinking – and moreover will spotlight linkages to ESD. The panel will be followed by an interactive discussion from the floor.

Content

5. A background document (Information Paper No. 5) on the UNECE Strategy on ESD in the context of Rio+20 was prepared by the Secretariat and consolidated with the Chair as well as the panellists. In order to facilitate the discussion, the background document outlines the green economy approach to sustainable development. It shows how ESD and green economy are two sides of the same coin: prominent green economy concepts focus mainly on top-down policies, such as financial incentives, while ESD can contribute significantly to greening the economy from the bottom up because it has the ability to equip people with the values, competences, knowledge and skills that are necessary for them to put the green economy concept into practice.

The Steering Committee will be invited to address the following core questions:

(a) What are the main interlinkages between ESD and the green economy?
(b) What are the main opportunities/topics for creating synergies?
(c) How can ESD in the UNECE region make an even stronger contribution to greening the economy?
(d) How can the visibility of ESD and of its importance for greening the economy be promoted in the relevant international policy processes?

Outcomes

6. Based on the panel discussion and its conclusions, the Steering Committee may wish to decide on activities to link the UNECE Strategy on ESD to the international sustainable development processes.