



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
26 July 2021

Original: English

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## Seventy-sixth session

Item 20 (h) of the provisional agenda\*

**Sustainable development: education for sustainable development**

## **Education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

### **Note by the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report prepared by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in accordance with General Assembly resolution [74/223](#).

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\* [A/76/150](#).



## **Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

### *Summary*

The new global framework for education for sustainable development for the period 2020–2030, entitled “Education for Sustainable Development: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals” (Education for Sustainable Development for 2030), was acknowledged as the official follow-up to the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development by the General Assembly in its resolution [74/223](#).

As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution [74/223](#), the present document provides a review of the implementation of education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular the launch of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) road map for education for sustainable development. The document includes an account of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development organized in May 2021 in Berlin, as well as findings from consultations with Member States, key stakeholders and United Nations organizations.

## I. Introduction

1. Education for sustainable development empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society. It is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education. Education for sustainable development is holistic and transformational education, which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It enhances the cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning and achieves its purpose by transforming society.

2. UNESCO has been the lead United Nations agency on education for sustainable development since the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which covered the period 2005–2014. The Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (2015–2019), which the General Assembly took note of in its resolutions [69/211](#) and [70/209](#), is aimed at scaling up action on education for sustainable development. In its resolution [72/222](#), adopted in 2017, the Assembly reaffirmed the role of UNESCO as the lead agency on education for sustainable development, which it recognized as an integral element of the Sustainable Development Goal on quality education and a key enabler of all the other Goals. In 2019, at its seventy-fourth session, the Assembly took note of the new global framework on education for sustainable development for 2030 in its resolution [74/223](#).

3. The new global framework for the period 2020–2030, entitled “Education for Sustainable Development: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals” (Education for Sustainable Development for 2030), builds upon the experience of the Global Action Programme in its five priority action areas of policy, education and training, educators, youth and communities. The framework emphasizes the learning content that is necessary for the survival and prosperity of humanity. This includes the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that can empower every learner to contribute to sustainable development. UNESCO supports partners and stakeholders, raises awareness and visibility, advocates education for sustainable development at the international level and supports Member States in its integration into education plans and programmes.

4. The present document was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/223](#), in which the Assembly requested UNESCO to present a report to the Assembly at its seventy-sixth session. It provides a review of the implementation of education for sustainable development under the framework for the period 2020–2030, as well as an account of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development organized as a virtual event in May 2021 in Berlin.

5. Considering that education for sustainable development is an integral part of the Education 2030 Agenda, the present report also highlights the mandated role of UNESCO in leading and coordinating that Agenda, through the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee, and provides an update on developments since early 2020.

## II. Addressing Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education

### Strengthening coordination on Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism

6. The work of UNESCO on education for sustainable development sits within the organization's wider mandate of Sustainable Development Goal 4. During the reporting period, UNESCO focused its efforts on strengthening coordination on Goal 4 through a reform of the Global Cooperation Mechanism on Education for greater efficiency and better delivery at the country level.

7. To respond to the amplification of the global learning crisis in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and to protect and promote education as a catalytic force for recovery and sustainable development more broadly, UNESCO, with the Governments of Ghana, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, convened an extraordinary session of the Global Education Meeting in October 2020.

8. At the meeting, Governments and the international community reaffirmed their commitment to the universal and holistic education agenda, triggering a dialogue about improving the Global Education Cooperation Mechanism as a means to support countries more effectively in the acceleration of progress towards Goal 4.

9. Through the adoption of the 2020 Global Education Meeting Declaration, UNESCO was mandated to design and lead a multi-stakeholder consultation process to develop a proposal to strengthen the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee to be able to effectively steer and coordinate the global education cooperation mechanism in line with the Education 2030 Framework for Action: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. The relevant provision of the 2020 Global Education Meeting Declaration is rooted in the recognition that, while the Steering Committee's mandate is of critical importance and considerable relevance for the coordination of global efforts in the field of education and beyond, assigning it greater political weight, visibility and decision-making power would contribute to the strengthening of the Steering Committee's position within the global education architecture. It was a call for renewed commitment to the Committee at the highest level so as to build on its achievements and make a meaningful difference in supporting countries in the acceleration of progress towards Goal 4.

11. As an immediate follow-up to the 2020 Global Education Meeting, a dedicated multi-stakeholder working group, co-chaired by UNESCO and Norway, was tasked with developing and consulting on a reform proposal to be put forward for endorsement in July at the ministerial segment of the Meeting in 2021. Alongside the working group discussions, an in-depth review of the current state of the Global Cooperation Mechanism on Education, a country survey on challenges and good practices and an extensive set of regional and constituency consultations allowed for the joint construction of the proposal.

12. The proposal for an improved Global Coordination Mechanism that is relevant to all countries and international actors will need to serve a dual purpose:

(a) Creating a strong overall enabling environment for faster progress towards Goal 4 by facilitating global/regional cooperation on better evidence, data and monitoring and by boosting the shared ambition and commitment to achieve results;

(b) Enabling time-bound acceleration initiatives developed by coalitions of countries or partners that are driven by country priorities, focused on specific themes (within the scope of the Education 2030 Steering Committee) and closely aligned to targets and plans of Governments and international actors.

13. As such, the overarching objective for an improved Global Coordination Mechanism is to generate conditions and incentives at the global and regional levels, such that actors across all constituencies cooperate more efficiently and effectively in the service of better and faster progress towards Goal 4 outcomes at the country level. To achieve this, the working group proposes three core functions for the Mechanism:

(a) Guide evidence-based policy formulation, to address the need for stronger evidence-based policymaking and implementation in the education sector at the global, regional and country levels;

(b) Monitor progress and improve the availability and use of data, so as to enhance the conditions for the accountability of global-level stakeholders for their commitments and performance by monitoring the translation of policy commitments into credible actions;

(c) Mobilize financing and improve alignment, for better mobilization and use of domestic and international education financing, including seeking renewed commitments from countries, and championing the pursuit of alternative and innovative sources of finance.

14. The strategies and main actions under these core functions will be further developed prior to the high-level segment of the Global Education Meeting in November 2021 by a small group of representative actors (covering Member States, international agencies and non-governmental organizations), which will produce detailed proposals in each case.

15. Putting these functions of the Global Cooperation Mechanism into practice requires an appropriate set of institutional arrangements. Throughout the various consultations, participants underscored the need to build on and create stronger synergies between the existing platforms and structures, calling in particular for the revitalization, upgrading and strengthening of the Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 Steering Committee to enable the body to deliver on its mandated role more effectively. Accordingly, the working group's proposal seeks to position the strengthened Steering Committee at the centre of an improved Coordination Mechanism to enhance the Committee's visibility, influence and impact.

16. The strengthened and rebranded Sustainable Development Goal Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee is expected to serve as the global education apex body. In line with the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, it will provide political leadership on global education priorities and create stronger incentives for accelerating progress towards Goal 4. It will provide strategic guidance, review progress, make recommendations on priorities/actions and help to strengthen accountability through high-level advocacy for adequate financing and monitoring, encourage harmonization and coordination of partner activities and oversee the Multilateral Education Platform. It will have a membership that is representative of the global education community.

17. The High-level Steering Committee structure will comprise a leadership group of 28 members at the ministerial or head of agency level (or equivalent) and a Sherpa group of senior technical representatives from the same constituency members, which will lead the technical work on the three functions and support the high-level political group. It will be co-chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO with a head of State or Government.

18. To ensure strong links to the United Nations Secretary-General, the Goal 4 High-level Steering Committee will continue to report to the high-level political forum on sustainable development on progress in the Education 2030 Agenda.

19. As the specialized United Nations agency for education, UNESCO will also serve as the host of the inter-agency secretariat of the Global Coordination Mechanism on Education to facilitate and ensure the engagement of all stakeholders at all levels. UNESCO will also continue to carry a broader technical role and responsibility in education with its technical expertise and resources, notably in the areas of data, monitoring, knowledge and evidence, but also in sustaining the high-level political commitment of its member States to the universal agenda of Goal 4 through its governing system.

20. The ministerial segment of the 2021 Global Education Meeting convened by UNESCO on 13 July 2021 marked the beginning of a new chapter for global education cooperation through the endorsement of the working group's proposal. The adoption of the meeting's outcome document paved the way towards greater synergies, better harmonization, reduced fragmentation and enhanced coordination and cooperation in the decade of action for sustainable development.

21. The high-level segment of the 2021 Global Education Meeting will take place in November 2021, to be organized by UNESCO and France at the margins of the forty-first session of the UNESCO General Conference and the Paris Peace Forum, in the context of which the High-level Steering Committee will be formally established.

22. Supporting the implementation, monitoring and financing of the education for sustainable development 2030 road map and the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development will be part of the work of the Education 2030 High-level Steering Committee and the Global Cooperation Mechanism on Education.

### **III. Review of education for sustainable development implementation**

23. International recognition of the importance of education for sustainable development as an integral element of quality education and a key enabler for sustainable development has grown. General Assembly resolutions [72/222](#) and [74/223](#) have recognized education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda as a key enabler of all the Goals and acknowledged the role of UNESCO in leading the Education 2030 Agenda. In addition, resolution [74/223](#) acknowledged the new global framework on education for sustainable development for 2030 and reinforced this by calling upon countries to enhance their implementation of education for sustainable development.

#### **A. Launching and global coordination of education for sustainable development for 2030**

24. The Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework is aimed at fully integrating education for sustainable development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into policies and learning. It aims to transform society by reorienting education so that it allows people of all ages globally to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for sustainable development.

25. Following the adoption of the new global Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework, UNESCO launched its implementation road map

by providing detailed guidance for Member States and other stakeholders to further enhance education for sustainable development efforts and implementation.

26. The road map addresses five priority action areas: advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building capacities of educators, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating local level actions. It invites countries to develop national initiatives on education for sustainable development and emphasizes the need for a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach as well as international cooperation, which is why a global network of partners will be established. Mobilization of resources, research and monitoring progress are also highlighted in the road map as important steps for implementation of the framework.

27. The road map was launched through five regional online events, which took place in November and December 2020, reaching more than 8,000 people in all regions.<sup>1</sup> The aim of these events was to engage with Member States and other stakeholders as well as invite country commitments on education for sustainable development. During these launches, Governments and representatives of national and regional institutions exchanged insights, ongoing efforts, key challenges and future commitments for implementation of the framework.

28. The regional discussions provided reflections and recommendations on how to build and strengthen education systems that support learners of all ages to be active contributors to more peaceful and sustainable societies and develop a sense of responsibility for our planet in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

29. To facilitate cooperation and partnerships around the 2030 framework, a global network, called “ESD-Net”, is being established to bring together policymakers and stakeholders. ESD-Net is aimed at reaching out to a wide range of stakeholders, including governmental agencies, civil society organizations, educators, youth, research institutions, United Nations partners, international development communities and business entities. It will be a platform for knowledge-sharing, collaboration, mutual learning, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

## **B. Addressing the COVID-19 crisis: the education for sustainable development response**

30. The COVID-19 crisis led to a questioning of some of the fundamental assumptions about lifestyles and behaviours. The pandemic has shown the importance for individuals and societies to have the ability to respond quickly to unexpected risks. This implies an ability to understand complexity, to anticipate different scenarios, to negotiate trade-offs, to be ready to act rapidly based on limited information and to collaborate in finding the best solutions. Education for sustainable development has long been an advocate for precisely these competencies for the promotion of sustainable development.

31. To stimulate discussions around the role and response of education for sustainable development in addressing the pandemic, UNESCO organized a series of online workshops to explore education’s potential to contribute to building a world that is more sustainable and equitable, as part of a blueprint to recover and rebuild beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Between September 2020 and April 2021, a series of seven online workshops were organized on key issues related to the global Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework and its relevance during

<sup>1</sup> Videos of the regional Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 launches (Africa, Arab region, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America) are available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/changing-education-meet-sustainable-development-goals-every-region-world>.

and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic to build back better. The workshops addressed questions such as: “What world do we want to live in beyond COVID-19?”, “What is necessary to rebuild and recover in a more sustainable and equitable way?” and “What role does education and particularly education for sustainable development play and how does it contribute to the transformation needed?” Organized in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany and the German Commission for UNESCO as an advisory partner, the workshops gathered over 15,000 people throughout the series. Participants called for support for educators and youth on holistic and inclusive approaches towards structural changes for more sustainable economic and social systems.

32. In February 2021, the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning and UNESCO organized a virtual briefing entitled “Education for sustainable development: a driver for building back better”. Bringing together key stakeholders, the speakers discussed pathways to create a momentum for strengthening education for sustainable development in building forward better, more sustainably and more inclusively amid the international community’s concerted efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The panel stressed the need for establishing a conducive environment to change mindsets and equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to contribute to a more sustainable world.

### **C. Berlin World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development**

33. The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, held virtually from Berlin from 17 to 19 May 2021, was a platform for global discussion and commitment to the 2030 road map, for the promotion of transformative education and for international conversation on the future of education for people and the planet. The Conference focused on strategies and optimal ways to harness education to address interconnected global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, green and circular economies, technological advancement and building resilient relationships with the planet. It also looked at ways to reinforce the capacity of educators, empower youth and accelerate local actions through education for sustainable development and to better integrate it into every level and setting of education and training.

34. Throughout the Conference, over 70 ministers and vice-ministers took the floor to share their countries’ plans to integrate education for sustainable development. Eighteen countries of the European Union shared their commitment to implement the 2030 framework, which is considered a driver for the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals. The strong commitments expressed by countries’ ministerial statements will be translated into concrete action through country initiatives.

35. The Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development was adopted by 2,800 education and environmental stakeholders from 130 countries, including over 70 education ministers and leading players, who committed to taking concrete steps to transform learning for the survival of the planet. It outlines a range of policies to transform learning encompassing teaching, learning, professional training and civic engagement. It also highlights the need to implement education for sustainable development with a focus on cognitive skills, social and emotional learning, collaboration skills, problem solving and resilience-building. In line with the conference objectives, the Declaration highlights education for sustainable development as an integral element of Goal 4 on quality education and a key enabler of all the other Goals. It acknowledges the transformational role of education for



sustainable development in addressing current global challenges, and links it to other relevant processes and agendas.

36. To increase understanding of education for sustainable development, advocate the need for change in education and learning to meet sustainability challenges and mobilize new audiences, UNESCO launched the “Learn for Our Planet” campaign (#LearnForOurPlanet) for the World Conference. The campaign translates education for sustainable development messaging into engaging and understandable language for a wide audience. It calls upon young people and other stakeholders to record a message stating why they think it is important to learn for our planet and share good practices. The campaign includes a toolkit of assets for social media, widely shared by speakers, participants, partners and other United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations programmes on youth and the Sustainable Development Goals. On social media, the conversations via the “Learn for Our Planet” campaign and the “Education for Sustainable Development for 2030” campaign (#ESDfor2030) in English had a total combined reach of more than 6.7 million across different platforms. It also had a reach of 60,000 across various websites and blogs. By June 2021, the campaign video in English had organically generated over 12,500 views across various platforms. The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development generated global attention, including 69 media leads from 23 countries, with a presence in every UNESCO region. Much media attention was generated at the national level by the appearance of government ministers. The call by UNESCO to make environmental education a core curriculum component by 2025 was picked up as the lead of a story by Reuters and syndicated widely. The livestreamed sessions on YouTube have been viewed over 20,000 times.

37. In parallel with the World Conference, UNESCO also encouraged people in all regions to take part in global efforts to promote education for sustainable development throughout the month of May 2021, including, for instance, over 100 events taking place in Germany as part of the activities to mark the Conference. In addition, a group hosted by UNESCO on the LinkedIn platform was launched for people interested in education for sustainable development, including policymakers, educators, trainers, leaders of educational institutions, students, youth, the private sector and everyone who is interested and engaged in building a better world through education.

#### **D. Country initiatives to implement education for sustainable development for 2030**

38. At the launch of the education for sustainable development for 2030 road map and to create momentum for implementation of its five priority action areas, UNESCO encouraged Member States to develop and implement country initiatives to mainstream education for sustainable development in their efforts to pursue sustainable development, building on the ongoing efforts in both the education and the sustainable development sectors. Currently around 50 countries are in the process of developing their country initiatives and a first group of countries announced their plans at the World Conference. Thanks to extrabudgetary support from the Government of Japan, UNESCO is supporting countries to organize a multi-stakeholder preparatory workshop for this umbrella country initiative to ensure an open, inclusive and evolving network of efforts across the sectors.

39. To ensure the outcomes of the World Conference are realized through concrete actions that can be implemented, UNESCO organized five online regional technical meetings to better understand the needs and approaches for education for sustainable development for 2030 in different regions, take stock of the preparation of country

initiatives and discuss regional challenges and opportunities related to implementation.

40. The technical meetings reviewed achievements, lessons learned, available resources and partners related to education for sustainable development in the regions, as well as region-specific needs and approaches. Recommendations from the meetings included strong encouragement for Member States in the regions to commit to the implementation of education for sustainable development for 2030, particularly to develop and launch their country initiatives.

## **E. Monitoring progress in achieving target 4.7 of the Goals**

41. As the recognized lead agency for education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, and in the framework of Goal 4 on education, UNESCO spearheads the monitoring of progress towards target 4.7 of the Goals. Given the target's unique and novel focus on the content and purpose of education, monitoring is challenging but progress continues to be made.

42. Target 4.7 of the Goals promotes quality education by ensuring learners are provided with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to respond to the challenges facing the world today. It emphasizes the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, and is closely aligned with the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

43. Indicator 4.7.1 of the Goals examines the extent to which education for sustainable development and global citizenship education are integrated into national education policies, curricula, teacher training and student assessment. The same indicator is also used for monitoring progress towards targets 12.8 on education for sustainable consumption and production and 13.3 on climate change education. The approved data source for the indicator is the regular reporting by UNESCO member States on their implementation of the 1974 recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms. The seventh global consultation on the recommendation was conducted from October 2020 to March 2021, during which 74 countries submitted a national report. Data for indicators 4.7.1, 12.8.1 and 13.3.1 of the Goals were published for the first time for 60 countries in June 2021 in the Global Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database.

44. In addition, UNESCO has commissioned a series of studies so as to provide additional information on progress towards achieving target 4.7 through education for sustainable development and global citizenship. At the end of 2019, UNESCO published *Educational Content Up Close: Examining the Learning Dimensions of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education*. The publication was based on a cross-national study of domestic education policies and curricula to analyse how learning objectives in the cognitive, socioemotional and behavioural domains of learning, in both education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, change from early childhood to secondary education. More recently, in May 2021, the publication *Learn for Our Planet: a Global Review of How Environmental Issues are Integrated in Education* was launched during the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development.

45. In addition, in 2021 UNESCO conducted a global survey of teachers' readiness to integrate education for sustainable development and global citizenship education into their teaching. The survey will shed light on progress towards achieving target 4.7 of the Goals from the viewpoint of one of the key players in achieving the target, teachers themselves. The first results of the study will be presented at the fifth UNESCO Global Forum on Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship at the end of 2021. The Forum will have a particular focus on the

measurement of progress towards achieving target 4.7 at the global, regional and national levels.

## **F. Inter-agency cooperation and global partnerships**

46. United Nations interagency cooperation for addressing various global sustainability challenges through education for sustainable development has been strengthened through various coordination mechanisms dedicated to specific issues, such as the United Nations Alliance on Climate Change Education, Training and Public Awareness, the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector and the One Planet network of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns.

47. UNESCO and other United Nations partners are involved in a working group of the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector on a two-year capacity development workplan to strengthen risk reduction and resilience through education. In 2019, UNESCO organized a global art contest on the theme “My School Protects Me” through its Associated Schools Network, to encourage all users of learning facilities to think about the importance of protecting students and ensuring that they can pursue their education in a safe learning environment. The voices and perspectives of children and young people, and their relationships with their own school, represent an invaluable contribution to discussions and efforts at the local, national and international levels for making schools safer and more resilient. The International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction and World Tsunami Awareness Day have also provided opportunities for members of the Global Alliance to promote school-level action to protect lives, as well as to spread good practices, through teachers and students, across communities.

48. To increase engagement from Governments on promoting sustainability through education, UNEP and UNESCO have been cooperating to integrate sustainable development as the core component of education through education for sustainable development and environmental education initiatives. A series of studies and advocacy initiatives are being planned to ensure commitment from Member States (ministries of education and ministries of the environment) to integrate education for sustainable development and environmental education as a core element of their respective national education systems. These studies are also aimed at enhancing collaboration between the education and environment sectors in Member States to come together on a new direction for action.

49. Joint actions have also been developed to enhance the voices and ideas of young people and support the education sector in meeting the education for sustainable development and environmental education demands of young people. For instance, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the Earth School was launched to keep students and parents connected to nature. Over 50 environmental and education experts collaborated, with guidance and support from TED-Ed and UNEP, to launch this online initiative for learners of all ages to discover, celebrate and connect with nature. This global project also received support from UNESCO and over 30 organizations, including National Geographic, the World Wildlife Fund and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

50. As part of the One Planet network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme, to contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 12, UNEP, UNESCO, members of the One Planet network and youth-led organizations around the world joined forces to encourage and inspire people to live simpler and lighter lives by amplifying calls to action for sustainable lifestyles globally through the Anatomy of Action digital challenge. The Challenge is a 15-day social media

challenge that encourages people to incorporate easy sustainable habits in five areas of action: food, stuff, money, move and fun.

51. Launched in September 2020, on World Cleanup Day, the UNESCO “Trash Hack” campaign encourages young people to learn about sustainability through tackling waste. “Trash hacks” are small things people can learn to help them act and live more sustainably for the planet. To support school communities, and teachers in particular, to engage their students in looking at waste in their schools, homes and communities, a practical guide, entitled “Trash hack: action learning for sustainable development”, was developed. Thousands of young people around the world have been joining the campaign to “trash hack” their homes, schools and communities and help to change the world. Students in over 60 countries have shared their inspirational stories on the trash hack blog and on social media and regionally specific campaigns have been devised with UNESCO offices to target youth around the world. The campaign has been supported by and is an official partner of ActNow and the United Nations Children’s Fund’s World’s Largest Lesson. It has also been featured by UNEP and other United Nations entities.

52. A new global initiative, Mission 4.7, was launched at the Vatican Youth Symposium in December 2020 by Global Schools and the SDG Academy, both flagship programmes of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, in collaboration with UNESCO and the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens, and the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University. The initiative will build on and draw upon the global leadership of UNESCO in education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. In addition to advocating the achievement of target 4.7 of the Goals at the global, national and local levels, Mission 4.7 will curate and create relevant educational resources and identify ways to train and support educators around the world.

#### **IV. Responding to the critical year for nature**

53. The Secretary-General is among many international environmental advocates labelling 2021 a critical year to reset our relationship with nature. The year 2021 presents the holding of landmark international events postponed in 2020, including the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and confronts the urgency of action to repair the relationship between humans and nature so as to address the multiple, intersecting environmental crises the world is facing.

54. Education is widely recognized as integral to the transformation of humans’ relationship with nature. In 2020, UNESCO conducted a global “World in 2030” survey in 25 languages, asking people to share their views on our world’s most pressing challenges and their possible solutions. Climate change and loss of biodiversity was the biggest challenge by far, chosen by 67 per cent of respondents. Education and education-based solutions came out on top as key to addressing them. The findings from the survey provide insights into the specific matters driving anxieties about major global challenges and the solutions needed to overcome them over the next decade.

55. In May 2021, UNESCO launched *Learn for Our Planet: A Global Review of How Environmental Issues are Integrated in Education*, a publication which looks at the rate of integration of environmental themes in national policy and curricula documents. The study conducted for the publication found that although environmental themes were often present, the depth of integration was extremely low. Of concern, less than half of the documents studied mentioned climate change and

only 19 per cent of the documents mentioned biodiversity. The study found that there was a continued focus on learning about climate and other environmental issues, as opposed to developing the socioemotional and action competences central for environmental and climate action. In an online survey of some 1,600 teachers and education leaders conducted for the study, one third of respondents indicated that environment-related issues were not part of teacher training. To address climate change, safeguard our biodiversity and ensure the survival of our planet, education must urgently change. It is vital to transform people's roles, actions and relationships with nature.

## **A. Tackling climate change**

56. UNESCO has been working to make education a more central and visible part of the international response to climate change through its education for sustainable development programme and its promotion of education for climate action. Acting as a global advocate for climate change education, UNESCO has been sharing knowledge and policy guidance, such as in its document entitled “Country progress on climate change education, training and public awareness”, which provides a status report on the implementation of climate change education in countries.

57. UNESCO has been providing country support and capacity-building through the recently launched country initiatives on Education for Sustainable Development for 2030, the “getting climate ready” project with the UNESCO Associated Schools Network and by providing teacher training on climate change education. It also encourages innovative approaches and enhances non-formal education programmes through the media, networking and partnerships.

58. Fruitful and active collaboration with the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has been ongoing for over a decade. To further support countries in the area of climate change education, UNESCO, in partnership with the secretariat, has developed and published a guide entitled “Integrating action for climate empowerment into nationally determined contributions”. This guide, which provides support to Member States to include strong commitments on education in their nationally determined contributions, was presented during a series of regional online webinars held in the second half of 2020.

59. UNESCO has contributed to a series of dialogues on action for climate empowerment organized by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and has helped to ensure the visibility of education at the conferences of the parties to the Convention through various events. UNESCO and the secretariat have also been working closely to mobilize different sectors to contribute to the action for climate empowerment agenda.

## **B. Addressing biodiversity loss**

60. Biodiversity protection is at the forefront of the core of UNESCO, along with ocean sciences, to rebuild humanity's relationship with nature and with living beings. The intersectoral strategy of UNESCO for biodiversity is based on three pillars: restore the relationship between humans and nature and regenerate ecosystems; conserve the harmony of our ecosystems; and amplify the power of youth.

61. School engagement with environmental issues should go beyond teaching and supporting environmental action in students and involve action within schools and by administrators, according to the study published in *Learn for Our Planet*. Environmental learning should be integrated across the curriculum, with a holistic

pedagogy that goes beyond an exclusive cognitive knowledge focus and aims to engage students socially and emotionally and in action-oriented learning and participation.

62. Both the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development include strong education components. Decision makers, schools, educators, young people, indigenous people and urban and rural communities, are encouraged and supported to incorporate ecosystem restoration into formal, non-formal and informal education and lifelong learning. In addition, learners are provided with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to understand ocean processes and related impacts through the promotion of ocean literacy to resolve marine environmental issues.

## V. Conclusion

63. The period addressed within the present report will be remembered for the unprecedented challenges the world is facing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this global crisis has also thrown into sharp relief the relevance of education for sustainable development and seen widespread renewal of commitment to and global recognition of education for sustainable development as a road map for change.

64. The interlinkages between human and planetary health have been highlighted through the COVID-19 pandemic. Zoonosis, which scientists believe is the potential cause of COVID-19 and will be a creator of future pandemics, becomes much more likely as wild animals are losing their habitats. The Secretary-General, among others, called upon Governments to rebuild economies and societies as ones that are more sustainable, resilient and inclusive. Education for sustainable development has been recognized as providing a framework for reimagining education so that it helps to build societies and economies and prepares learners to face future challenges such as pandemics, as well as to become agents of change who will help to prevent future environment-related crises. Education for sustainable development is promoted as being both vital for the survival of the planet and economically advantageous: with the increased focus on green economies there will be a need for talent pipelines to provide people with education that equips them with green skills and for retraining programmes for workers in unsustainable industries.

65. Increased global commitment to education for sustainable development and the Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework has been demonstrated by the success of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, where over 80 Governments and 2,800 education and sustainable development stakeholders adopted the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development. The increasing number of ministers and vice-ministers requesting to share their countries' related achievements and strategies for the future as part of the ministerial round table, as well as the 50 member States that have already expressed interest in commencing a country initiative on education for sustainable development, speaks to the increased political buy-in to education for sustainable development. Compared with prior conferences, the World Conference also received more public attention through social media and the press, showing a boost in public understanding and support for the reimagining of education through education for sustainable development.

66. Education for sustainable development has been recognized as being key to the sustainability agenda and an enabler of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but there is increasing acknowledgement of the need for the education sector to enhance collaboration with other sectors to achieve needed change. As such, the Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework promotes linkages between education

ministries and other relevant actors, in particular environment ministries. On the global level, UNESCO is working with other relevant United Nations organizations and key stakeholders to ensure the streamlining of programmes and the increase of collaboration to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and target 4.7 of the Goals.

67. The urgency of the interconnected environmental challenges the world is facing, and the important role of education in healing the human relationship with nature, requires an environmental refocus of the work of UNESCO on education for sustainable development. The Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework promotes education that connects the social, economic and cultural causes of these challenges, and gives learners the knowledge, skills, values and initiative to act for the survival of our shared planet. The stark findings of the UNESCO *Learn for Our Planet* report, which shows that environmental themes, including climate change and biodiversity, are vastly underrepresented in the global national curricula and policy documents studied, evidences that more effort is needed to ensure that education prepares teachers and learners address current and future environmental challenges. The position of 2021 as a critical year for nature presents many opportunities for global commitment to the Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework and for the integration of education into environmental strategies, policies and programmes globally.

68. Immediate action is needed to transform education so that it supports the societal transformation needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda and address the interlinked environmental crises threatening the future of our planet caused by human behaviour. The success of the World Conference and the adoption of the Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development built momentum for the successful implementation of the Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 road map, impelling Member States to lead a network of actors who together can implement this ambitious vision for transformative education, which is crucial for humankind's survival.

## Annex

### Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development

#### Preamble

1. We, participants from governments, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society, youth, the academic community, the business sector and all spheres of teaching and learning, convened online from 17 to 19 May 2021 for the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, and with the German Commission for UNESCO as an advisory partner, adopt this declaration.

2. We are convinced that urgent action is needed to address the dramatic interrelated challenges the world is facing, in particular the climate crisis, mass loss of biodiversity, pollution, pandemic diseases, extreme poverty and inequalities, violent conflicts and other environmental, social and economic crises that endanger life on our planet. We believe that the urgency of these challenges, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, requires a fundamental transformation that sets us on the path of sustainable development based on more just, inclusive, caring and peaceful relationships with each other and with nature.

3. We are confident that education is a powerful enabler of positive change in mindsets and worldviews and that it can support the integration of all dimensions of sustainable development, economy, society and the environment, ensuring that development trajectories are not exclusively orientated towards economic growth to the detriment of the planet, but towards the well-being of all within planetary boundaries.

4. We are confident that education for sustainable development, anchored in target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals and as an enabler for all 17 of the Goals, is the foundation for the required transformation, providing everyone with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to become change agents for sustainable development. Education for sustainable development enables learners to develop their cognitive and non-cognitive skills, such as critical thinking and competences for collaboration, problem solving, coping with complexity and risk, building resilience and thinking systemically and creatively, and empowering them to take responsible action as citizens, fulfilling their right to quality education as defined in Goal 4, education. We believe that education for sustainable development must be based on and promote respect for nature, as well as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, non-discrimination, equity and gender equality. In addition, it should promote intercultural understanding, cultural diversity, a culture of peace and non-violence, inclusion and the notion of responsible and active global citizenship.

5. We welcome the new Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 framework and its road map for implementation as our guiding documents for the next 10 years to mobilize action on education for sustainable development in the areas of policy, transforming learning environments, capacity development of educators, youth empowerment and local level action.

#### Our commitment

6. We, within our respective mandates and in our areas of responsibility, taking into account our needs, capacities, available resources and national priorities, commit to the following:



(a) Ensure that education for sustainable development is a foundational element of our education systems at all levels, with environmental and climate action as a core curriculum component, while maintaining a holistic perspective on education for sustainable development that recognizes the interrelatedness of all dimensions of sustainable development;

(b) Integrate education for sustainable development into all levels of education and training from early childhood to tertiary and adult education, including technical and vocational education and training, and into non-formal education and informal learning, so that all individuals are provided with lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities for sustainable development;

(c) Implement education for sustainable development with joint emphasis on the cognitive skills, social and emotional learning and action competences for the individual and societal dimensions of transformation, promoting individual behavioural change for sustainable development, equality and respect for human rights, as well as fundamental structural and cultural changes at the systemic level of economies and societies, and also promoting the required political action to bring about these changes;

(d) Harness the power of education for sustainable development for the redesign of our societies, encouraging, inter alia, access to scientific knowledge and data sharing to facilitate research, evidence-based policies, democratic decision-making and the recognition of indigenous knowledge, to promote sustainable and transformative economies centred on respect for the well-being of people as well as for the planet, and to enhance resilience and preparedness for future global crises;

(e) Promote a whole-of-institution approach, recognizing that learners and the school community become meaningfully engaged in sustainable development through democratic participation when their institutions become living laboratories for participation and active citizenship, equity and gender equality, health, connections with nature and respect for the environment, energy efficiency and sustainable consumption, and where learning is experiential, action-oriented, localized and culturally specific, allowing learners to learn what they live and live what they learn;

(f) Recognize climate change as a priority area of education for sustainable development of particular importance to small island developing States, as they require special attention in terms of implementation of education for sustainable development owing to their increasing vulnerability to climate change and natural hazards;

(g) Also recognize the crucial role of teachers to promote education for sustainable development and invest in the capacity development of teachers and other education personnel at all levels and to ensure a whole-of-sector approach to the necessary transformation of education;

(h) Harness the potential of new, digital and 'green' technologies to ensure that the access, development and use of technologies is responsible, safe, equitable, inclusive and based on critical thinking and sustainability principles with a proper assessment of risks and benefits, as well as promotes open educational resources, open science and affordable eLearning facilities for education for sustainable development;

(i) Empower young people as change agents for sustainable development, by creating opportunities for learning and civic engagement and providing them with the competencies and tools to participate in education for sustainable development as co-creators of individual and societal transformation;

(j) Prioritize marginalized populations, including persons with disabilities, refugees and persons affected by conflict, crises and natural disasters, through an inclusive approach by promoting innovative education for sustainable development

policies which are contextualized and embedding education for sustainable development in emergency education;

(k) Emphasize gender equality and non-discrimination in access to knowledge and skills, and ensure gender mainstreaming in education for sustainable development which enables a more profound and holistic understanding of sustainability challenges and potential solutions;

(l) Mobilize education for sustainable development to combat poverty, particularly extreme poverty, and provide learners with relevant competencies to meet individual and societal demands, including through technical and vocational education and training and skills development for sustainable livelihoods to ensure human dignity and the right to live decently;

(m) Enhance multisectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration on education for sustainable development at all levels of governance, with ministries of education collaborating with all other ministries that have an impact on sustainable development, to ensure a whole-of-government approach, with strengthened cooperation between ministries of education and ministries of the environment at the core, as well as with all other relevant stakeholder groups, such as non-governmental organizations, the academic community, the business sector, youth and others;

(n) Support the further alignment, at the global, regional and national levels, of the education, environment, climate, sustainable economy and other relevant development agendas, and enhance networking between different stakeholder groups in order to ensure that efforts are mutually supportive and complementary and support structural mainstreaming of education for sustainable development;

(o) Allocate sufficient resources and protect the domestic and international financing of education for sustainable development at the time of COVID-19 and beyond, and emphasize the role that international development cooperation plays in promoting quality education and youth empowerment in developing countries in ways that strengthen the power of education in making all societies more just and sustainable;

(p) Monitor progress in education for sustainable development, in the context of the overall monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and target 4.7 of the Goals in particular, in order to ensure that implementation is continuously improved and helps to ensure that no-one is left behind, put in place assessment systems on education for sustainable development and enhance research on how to evaluate progress.

### **Way forward**

7. We invite UNESCO, as the lead United Nations agency for education for sustainable development, to support the implementation of the present declaration in cooperation with Member States, mobilizing its networks, including the University Twinning and Networking Programme (UNITWIN)/UNESCO Chairs, UNESCO Associated Schools Network and UNESCO designated sites, among others, and ensuring regular reviews of implementation progress.

8. We commit to taking this declaration and its provisions forward through relevant global, regional, national and local processes, looking ahead to important milestones such as the 2021 fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2021 twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and beyond.

9. Transformative learning for people and the planet is a necessity for our survival and that of future generations. The time to learn and act for our planet is now.