



**United Nations Environment Programme
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean**

PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT
PROGRAMA DAS NAÇOES UNIDAS PARA O MEIO AMBIENTE

**Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of
the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Panama City, Panama
20 to 25 November 2003**

A. PREPARATORY MEETING OF EXPERTS
20TH TO 21ST NOVEMBER 2003

Distribution:

Limited

UNEP/LAC-IGWG.XIV/.10

Monday 13, October 2003

Original: Spanish

**Proposal of a Latin American and
the Caribbean Programme on
Environmental Education, in the
framework of Sustainable
Development**

Executive Summary

This proposal (Executive Summary) has been prepared by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the consideration of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

I. Background

1. This document has been prepared for presentation in item 6.2 of the Agenda of the Preparatory Meeting of Experts of the XIV Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama City, Panama, November 20-25, 2003). It is submitted to the consideration of the Forum of Ministers of the "Latin America and Caribbean Proposed Program on Environmental Education within the Framework of Sustainable Development". The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela presents it.
2. The specific objectives and the coordination and implementation mechanisms of this proposal should be analyzed; it complements the Proposal of the Environmental Training Network within the framework of the implementation strategy of the Latin America and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development.
3. The recommendations of experts on the development of environmental training in the region will be submitted to the consideration of the Ministers of the Environment.

II. Presentation

4. This proposal (Executive Summary) has been prepared by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to be submitted to the consideration of the XIV Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Latin America and Caribbean region (henceforth LAC) is one of the richest regions, not only due to its biodiversity and ecosystems, but also because of the wealth of its socio-cultural diversity. The development model has endangered this wealth, for which reason the entire region is sending out distressing signals of profound environmental deterioration. Some of the common problems include: the deterioration of biological diversity, massive destruction of basins, marked deterioration of the environmental conditions of the coastal zones and territorial seas, massive deforestation, pollution of water and air, loss of cultural identity, and ignominious living conditions in many popular zones. This situation increases the vulnerability of the population in light of global economic changes, the threat of pandemic disease and the occurrence of environmental catastrophes.
5. At present, the Latin America and Caribbean region is undergoing a process of change and transformation characterized by social struggles that attempt to revert this situation and attain equity, peace, respect of nature, and the re-attainment of recognition and legitimization.
6. It has been proven that the most efficient way to foster and consolidate the necessary changes is by encouraging increased awareness of the people concerning the value of a sound, safe and ecologically balanced environment, as well as by providing the necessary training to promote and maintain said changes.
7. In order for these objectives to be reached, the kind of education required is that which addresses the transformation of the social, economic and cultural models that are responsible for the present problems within the framework of sustainable development. This criterion compels environmental education to work toward the democratization of environmental knowledge, the collective building of ethics in human behaviour, the training of participatory, empowered individuals and communities working toward a common cause and able to build sustainable societies based on their own manners, capacities, dreams and cultural particularities. The present challenge

for the whole region is the promotion of programs focusing on environmental education (EE) designed within this framework and with a Latin America and Caribbean tint and identity.

8. In the LAC region, environmental education has developed unevenly and diversely, generating a mosaic of experiences of great conceptual and methodological wealth that has led to an important process of the consolidation and institutionalization of this field in all countries. This situation has been manifested in the progressive incorporation of the environmental dimension in study programs and in processes of environmental management, as well as development plans in all the countries of the region.

9. In spite of these achievements, the development process of environmental education in the region has not been problem-free. Some of these have been: the lack of sufficient and sustained economic support, the existence of contradictions and gaps in the usage of concepts and methods, insufficient teaching capacity, scarcity in the production and distribution of teaching materials, and the lack of evaluation mechanisms and of continuity in the programs. These obstacles have generated weaknesses in institutional aspects and hindered the attainment of meaningful progress in key areas.

10. Besides the above-mentioned, there are also huge difficulties for communication, cooperation and exchange of experiences and projects on environmental education among the different countries in the region. This situation frequently generates dependency on focuses and proposals that differ from those of regional needs and particularities.

11. Based on this context, the LAC Region has fostered various initiatives geared toward encouraging the development of a regional mindset in the area of environmental education and to promoting different cooperation mechanisms and mechanisms working as a network.

12. In consequence to these efforts, in the subsequent fora and regional meetings that have taken place during the last ten years a proposal has been consolidated to address the establishment of mechanisms for regional cooperation which may facilitate communication, cooperation and shared tasks among the different stakeholders: organized society, educational institutions, enterprises and government organizations that exist in the region.

13. In parallel manner, and within the framework of the engagements of Agenda 21, the governments of the region have been advancing processes in decision-making and cooperation in environmental management as well as in the expansion and improvement of the quality of educational programs, both within schools and outside schools.

14. This joint effort of the governments of the region contributed to consolidating the proposals discussed during the recent Johannesburg Summit, participating so that the decisions achieved would, on one hand, have a social focus, and on the other hand set concrete actions for the international action.

15. An important milestone resulting from this event was the recommendation to the General Assembly of United Nations to consider the possibility of declaring a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, starting in 2005.

16. Based on this context, the government of the Republic of Venezuela has proposed to the countries of the region the establishment of a Latin America and Caribbean Agreement on Environmental Education, framed within the principles of sustainable development, and the Johannesburg Plan of Action.

III. General Objective and Specific Objectives

17. The General Objectives proposed in the agreement are:

To establish a permanent regional mechanism that promotes the coordination of policies, stimulates the development of programs and projects, and fosters communication; and the exchange and mutual support among the governments of the region, as well as between these and other social actors involved in the development of environmental educational programs.

18. For the development of this objective, the following specific objectives and actions are suggested:

a) To consolidate public policies on environmental education within the framework of sustainable development.

19. In order to comply with the specific objective, a necessary priority action has been proposed: the development of mechanisms that promote:

- a) Exchange, communication and mutual support among the organizations of management of the national policies in the field of environmental education;
- b) The compilation and analysis of educational policies on environmental education of the countries of the region;
- c) the compilation and dissemination of proposals on environmental education that take place or have taken place in the region, as well as articulation and synergy among the present educational aspects that are present in different conferences, conventions, agreements and other global or regional instruments;
- d) the implementation of criteria and mechanisms for the evaluation of the educational-environmental processes;
- e) the compilation and systematization of experiences in the field of environmental education in the region; and
- f) the establishment of a regional agreement to increase financial resources in each of the countries, geared toward strengthening of national programs on environmental education.

b) To establish and consolidate mechanisms for the network, fostering integration and increased communication among public and private organizations in the region.

20. The development of this objective demands:

- a) The consolidation of the networks of environmental educators of the region;
- b) the establishment of a platform focusing on disseminating regional experiences on environmental education and facilitating the development of forums and exchange of information;
- c) the incorporation of existing networks in the decision-making process for management of environmental education, at both national and regional levels; and

- d) the design of a regional directory of organizations, institutions and professionals working on the front of environmental education.

c) To strengthen the conceptual and methodological aspects of environmental education within the framework of sustainable development from a regional standpoint.

21. The following actions are to be considered within this objective:

- a) The preparation of proposals and regional projects framed in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development;
- b) The incentive for the undertaking of research programs in the field of environmental education;
- c) the establishment of a permanent seminar to discuss epistemology, axiology, and the construction of concepts on environmental education within the framework of sustainability; and
- d) the support or the creation of specialized regional newsletters, as well as the support of bibliography on environmental education subjects.

d) To reinforce the capacity and continuous updating of educators and other stakeholders involved in the environmental-educational processes in the region.

22. The priority actions for the fulfillment of this objective include:

- a) the dissemination of training programs in environmental education matters existing in the region, as well as interconnection and communication among institutions that develop these programs;
- b) an exchange of professionals and researchers in the field of environmental education;
- c) the identification of focal points to develop pilot programs in the updating, training and certification of staff in the field of environmental education;
- d) the production, edition and dissemination of documents, materials and other reference and non- reference resources.

e) To promote the development of financing mechanisms and implementation for the development of the Agreement.

23. To accomplish with this objective, the following actions are considered:

- a) the establishment of a Latin America and Caribbean fund for financing support to projects and programs of regional interest, and
- b) the implementation of the Agreement within the framework of the UNEP Environmental Training Network for Latin America and the Caribbean.

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