SEPN
The Sustainability and
Education Policy Network

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## ACTION FOR CLIMATE EMPOWERMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sustainability and Education Policy Network (SEPN) is a network of researchers and organizations examining international education systems to enable deeper responses to sustainability, including climate change, within policy and practice. SEPN is pleased to submit the following recommendations in response to the UNFCCC 2020 call for recommendations on: (1) a subsequent work programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), and (2) agenda items for future ACE Dialogues.

**RECOMMENDATION #1: CRITERIA FOR FUTURE REPORTING AND TARGET-SETTING ON ACE IMPLEMENTATION**
The necessity of education, training, and public awareness in mitigating dangerous human interference with the climate system has been internationally recognized since 1992 in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).[1] This global mission has intensified since 2015, through Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, the launching of the 'Action for Climate Empowerment' programme, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 13.3 to "improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning."[2,3] This includes education, training, and public awareness in relation to formal education, government, media, civil society, business, public, and other sectors.

Despite the rising impetus for climate literacy[4] and action across sectors, robust cross-national data on ACE implementation is not yet available to enable tracking and target-setting. Global indicators and datasets would permit international comparisons of national policy targets.[5,6,7] While the UN SDGs do include several monitoring indicators related to ACE implementation, their value and scope are undermined by limited global coverage and poor-quality data. These data are inconsistently completed, often by a single government official or unit, and without baseline agreement on what constitutes quality ACE implementation.[8,9,10] In relation to this state of affairs, the 2016 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report called for more systematic and rigorous approaches to monitoring country progress on climate and sustainability education.[7] Stronger indicators and reporting on ACE implementation would offer augmented and comprehensive global monitoring to advance UNFCCC Conference of the Parties intergovernmental negotiations, SDG progress, and the setting and meeting of national and regional policy and practice targets.

Countries mentioning ACE elements in UNFCCC national submissions, globally and by region
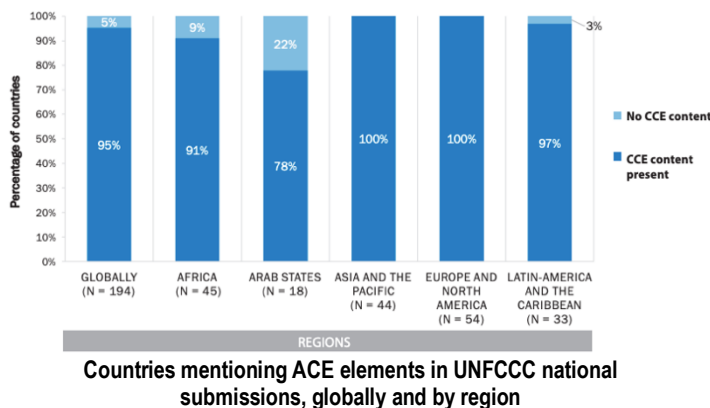
In a 2019 UNESCO study, SEPN analyzed 368 documents from 194-member countries (2014–2018) under UNFCCC intergovernmental agreements, including National Communications, Nationally Determined Contributions, and National Adaptation Plans (1992, 2015).[11,1,3] We examined the quality and quantity of content on education, training, and public awareness in these documents through a multi-month coding process and found almost all countries included information on ACE implementation, but only 30% of the content was quantifiable and usable in national or intergovernmental benchmarking or as ACE implementation indicator data.[10]
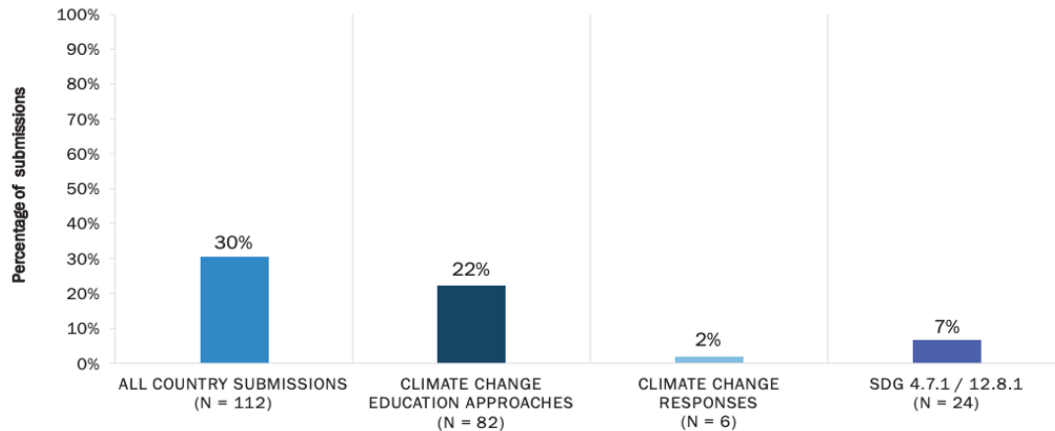
UNFCCC country submissions with quantitative data appropriate for global tracking and target-setting

While most UNFCCC parties are already reporting on ACE implementation, a lack of specific guidelines for National Communications and Nationally Determined Contributions in relation to ACE have led to inconsistencies in the type of information included, and thus a missed opportunity for comparable data for tracking and target-setting. Reporting and target-setting processes should use numeric data (e.g., number of trainings) and data about the impact of programs on individuals and communities.[12] Without data to track and target-set in global progress toward ACE implementation, we are lacking a major lever to motivate increased climate change education, training, and public awareness, which is central to enabling the social and political will to address climate change.[13,14,15] By agreeing to specific ACE guidelines for national submissions, Parties would enable more effective tracking and target-setting on ACE implementation as part of existing UNFCCC reporting mechanisms.

SEPN recommends the following reporting <u>criteria</u> to track ACE implementation across Parties through National Communications, as well as requiring ACE targets in Nationally Determined Contributions:

Education: Use SDG indicator 4.7.1 (same as 12.8.1 and new 13.3.1), "Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment"[16], and specifically in relation to climate. Data on these indicators are already provided by countries to UNESCO, and could also be included in UNFCCC national submissions. Recommend adding components regarding extent of inclusion of climate education i) in all grades and subjects, ii) in ways that includes cognitive but also socio-emotional and behavioral learning, and iii) in a 'whole-institution' capacity (see below for more information).

Training: Proportion of government employees at a) national and b) sub-national levels who receive training on climate change, both scientific and cultural mitigation/adaptation strategies.

Public Awareness: Extent to which a) national and b) sub-national governments have implemented public awareness programs and policies in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and where possible, collect data on the "impact of such activities on individuals and communities."[11]

Public Participation: Extent of i) membership in non-governmental civil society organizations focused on climate education, awareness, and public participation, and ii) number of these organizations nationally.

Public Access to Information: Adapt SDG indicator 16.10.2 to measure the "number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information" [14] in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Also the extent to which accurate information related to climate change is included on a) national and b) sub-national government websites, and the presence of national media guidelines supporting accurate reporting on climate change in news outlets.

International Cooperation: Extent of international collaboration on ACE implementation, and in which of the five areas mentioned above (i.e., education, training, public awareness, public participation, and public access to information).

RECOMMENDATION #2: DE-EMPHASIZE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS IN THE SUBSEQUENT ACE PROGRAMME

Currently, the ACE Guidelines specify countries should designate National Focal Points to support ACE activities in their countries. In practice, however, the work of National Focal points has been disjointed and difficult, in part because this role does not align with the broader UNFCCC processes of Parties. Designating a single National Focal Point comes with additional challenges, such as their capacity for national reach and staffing turnover. The future ACE programme could benefit from a de-emphasis on National Focal Points, and instead allow each Party to decide the best ACE reporting and support processes for their country. For example, national Ministries of Environment are often responsible for setting and achieving emission reduction targets, and are well positioned to coordinate with other ministries and regional governments to enable national ACE reporting and support.

RECOMMENDATION #3: FOCUS ON ACE IMPLEMENTATION QUANTITY, QUALITY, AND PROCESS AT ACE DIALOGUES

Despite the rising international imperative for ACE implementation,[17] we lack global understandings of not only the pervasiveness of ACE implementation (its *quantity*), but also what constitutes and contributes to effective ACE implementation (its *quality*). Much ACE implementation research and practice assumes that increasing people's knowledge on the science of climate change is, on its own, sufficient to increase motivation and capacity to take climate action.[18,19] In contrast, recent sociological, psychological, and anthropological research indicates that the strongest factors in climate change belief and action are social and psychological, not cognitive understanding. Cultural and political affiliation are the greatest predictors of belief in climate change, suggesting that engaging frames and norms specific to population groups can elicit greater grasp and action.[20,21,22,23] For example, positioning climate change in the language and priorities of Indigenous, religious, and business communities makes it "come to matter" to members of those communities, overcoming prior climate change denial. Related research in climate change communication suggests that public awareness climate campaigns should employ nudge and social incentive approaches.[24,25,26,27]
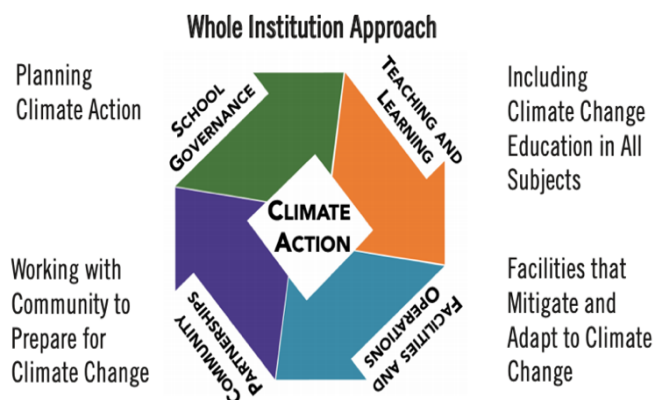
Insight is also growing on the urgency of attending to psychology and emotion in relation to *eco-anxiety* and loss experienced as a result of climate change.[28,29,30] Against the background of the rapidly growing knowledgeability of people about climate change, the importance of avoiding future pessimism, hopelessness and passivity,[31,32,33] by equipping individuals with individual and collective agency,[34] is becoming increasingly emphasized. Evidence increasingly demonstrates that ACE implementation must tackle these psycho-social and behavioral considerations to advance climate literacy and action.[35] Policy and practice, however, still tend to focus mainly on scientific literacy, instead of also engaging psycho-social and behavioral dimensions essential to overcoming climate denial and inaction.

As part of the 2019 UNESCO study mentioned above, SEPN found a 3:1 focus on cognitive learning over behavioural, and socio-emotional learning in the orientations of Parties to ACE implementation. This suggests that psycho-social and action dimensions of climate literacy are largely unaddressed in Parties' ACE implementation strategies.[10]
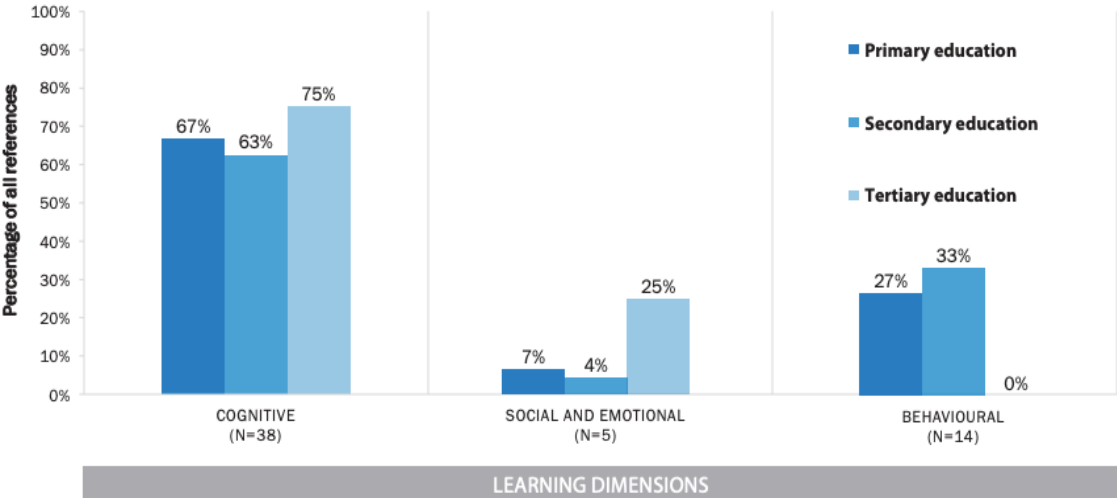
Learning dimensions in formal education. Percentages sum to 100% across each level of education

To maximize learning and to model climate action in formal education, ACE implementation should involve all areas of institutional activity. This 'whole institution' approach to climate change involves engagement in each of the areas of teaching and learning, facilities and operations, community partnerships, and governance.[36,37] Whole institution approaches integrate actions across as many areas as possible to make it more likely institutional cultures will shift towards sustained climate change belief and actions. For example, after an institution implements a climate action plan (governance), they could invite local experts (community partnerships) to work with students or employees to implement the plan (teaching and learning), which may lead to installing solar panels (facilities and operations).

Whole Institution Approach

Planning Climate Action

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Including Climate Change Education in All Subjects

CLIMATE ACTION

Working with Community to Prepare for Climate Change

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

Facilities that Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change

At the 2020 ACE dialogue, we recommend discussing and showcasing *quality* ACE implementation by highlighting examples that: 1) incorporate interdisciplinary and whole-institution understandings of ACE implementation and 2) focus on cognitive, behavioral, and socio-emotional learning dimensions. To aid these discussions, we have created an ACE implementation primer, detailing how Ministries of Education, schools, and school divisions can inform and empower climate action.[38]

We recommend the following discussion points for future ACE Dialogues:

- Extent to which ACE elements of **education**, **training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation** address cognitive, behavioural, and socio-emotional learning dimensions:
  - *Cognitive*: Aimed at developing knowledge and thinking skills necessary to better understand climate change and the challenges in achieving it. The goal is for learners "to acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national and local issues, the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations, as well as social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development."[34]
  - *Socio-emotional:* Aimed at developing social skills that enable learners to collaborate, negotiate and communicate about climate change as well as self-reflection skills, values, attitudes and motivations that enable learners to develop themselves. The goal is for learners "to have a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity, as well as feel and assume a sense of responsibility for the future."[34]
  - *Behavioural*: Aimed at developing action competencies. The goal is for learners "to act effectively and responsibly at local, national and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world." [34]
- Extent to which ACE implementation is incorporated and integrated across institutions within teaching and learning, governance, facilities and operations, and community partnerships, as relevant across the six ACE elements.

We suggest our recommendations, recapped below, not be expected to be carried out by National Focal points, but through more robust organizational structures for ACE activity tracking, target-setting, and support within Parties.

In sum, SEPN is offers the following recommendations for (1) future work of the Doha work programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), and (2) agenda items for future ACE Dialogues:

1. IMPLEMENT CRITERIA FOR FUTURE REPORTING AND TARGET-SETTING ON ACE (NCS, NDCS, NAPS)
2. DE-EMPHASIZE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS IN SUBSEQUENT ACE PROGRAMME
3. FOCUS ON ACE IMPLEMENTATION QUANTITY, **QUALITY**, AND PROCESS AT FUTURE ACE DIALOGUES

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