United Nations
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Education
Sector

In partnership with

United Nations
Climate Change

Integrating Action for Climate Empowerment into Nationally Determined Contributions

A short guide for countries

Education 2030

UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.

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UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to ***"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."*** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Education Sector

Education 2030

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"Education is crucial for climate action because it has the exceptional power to make evolve mindsets and behaviours in the long run. Because education can change minds, it can change the world."

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO

"The six elements of ACE – education, training, public awareness, public access to information, public participation and international cooperation on these – are essential for countries and communities to counter climate change and adapt to its impacts."

Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Climate Change

Why this guide?

In the framework of the 2020 review of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, this guide aims to provide countries with advice on how to enhance ambition and address the six elements of 'Action for Climate Empowerment' (ACE) – Education, Training, Public Awareness, Public Access to Information, Public Participation and International Cooperation – in their respective NDCs.

In five simple questions and answers, it provides suggestions for elements that can be integrated into the NDCs in order to make ACE an integral part of countries' climate responses. The guide also shows why ACE is key to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and its greenhouse gas emission targets.

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Two existing UN publications have informed parts of this guide:

- UNESCO/UNFCCC (2016): Action for Climate Empowerment: Guidelines for accelerating solutions through education, training and public awareness
- UNDP (2019): Guide to Strengthening National Climate Plans by 2020

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List of acronyms

ACE	Action for Climate Empowerment
CCA	Climate change adaptation
CCM	Climate change mitigation
COP	Conference of the Parties
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
GHG	Greenhouse gases
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LTS	Long-term Emissions Reduction Strategy
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1) What is Action for Climate Empowerment?

Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) denotes work under Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992) and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement (2015) and their six elements: Climate Change **Education, Training, Public Awareness, Public Access to Information, Public Participation, and International Cooperation** on these issues.

Implementation of all six elements has increasingly been recognized as crucial in solving the complex challenges presented by climate change. This is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (for example SDG targets 4.7 and 13.3) to which the ACE agenda is closely related.

In line with the Doha work programme on Article 6 of the Convention (2012-2020), ACE shall be guided by the following principles:

- a country-driven approach according to the national circumstances;
- gender and an intergenerational approach;
- a phased approach integrating ACE into existing climate change policies, programmes and strategies;
- an interdisciplinary multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and participatory approach;
- promotion of partnerships, networks and synergies;
- the principles of sustainable development.

2) What is the procedure for NDC review?

The Paris Agreement requires Parties to communicate a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) every five years, each time representing a progression from previous efforts and reflecting the maximum ambition that the country can put together on the basis of its capacity. By 2020, those countries that have already submitted an NDC with a time frame up to 2025 are requested to communicate a new NDC, and the countries with an NDC with a time frame up to 2030 are requested to communicate a new NDC or update their existing NDC.

The need to step up efforts has taken on renewed urgency in light of the 2018 IPCC special report on 1.5°C, which underscored the need to halve emissions by 2030. Therefore, the year **2020 offers countries the opportunity to assess whether their NDCs reflect their highest possible ambition** and whether they could do more to contribute to collective efforts towards achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. **The NDC revision process is also a key opportunity for countries to integrate ACE through activities aimed at building political will, strengthening societal ownership and engaging youth, civil society, the private sector and other key stakeholders to build a whole-of-society consensus over enhanced NDC ambition**.

In general, countries are encouraged to improve their NDCs through a clear and inclusive process with high-level buy-in; align their NDCs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and communicate their NDCs transparently. NDCs tend to be interdisciplinary in nature, requiring involvement from multiple different ministries and implementing agencies as well as participation and understanding of the civil society. For overall guidance on how to establish a multi-stakeholder NDC enhancement process, please refer to the UNDP "Guide to Strengthening National Climate Plans by 2020".

Table 1 • ACE elements - scope and objectives

Scope	Objectives	
Education	Change habits in the long-term	Foster a better understanding of, and ability to address climate change and its effects
Training	Develop practical skills	
Public Awareness	Reach people of all ages and walks of life	Promote community engagement, creativity and knowledge in finding climate change solutions
Public Access to information	Make information freely available	
Public Participation	Involve all stakeholders in decision-making and implementation	Engage all stakeholders in debate and partnership to respond collectively to climate change
International Cooperation	Strengthen cooperation, joint efforts and knowledge exchange	

Source: UNESCO/UNFCCC 2016

3) Why integrate ACE into NDCs?

Activities regarding all six priority elements of ACE are essential, both for climate change mitigation and adaptation: **ACE prepares individuals, decision makers, government entities, productive sectors and society at large for the challenges that climate change brings, and empowers them to act upon these:**

- Education enables people to understand the causes and consequences of climate change, to make informed decisions and to take appropriate actions to address it.
- Training provides the core technical and soft skills as well as advanced knowledge needed to support the transition to green economies and sustainable, inclusive climate-neutral and resilient societies.
- Successful public awareness campaigns engage communities and individuals in the common effort needed to foster climate-friendly behaviour, sustainable lifestyles and implement national, regional, sectoral and international climate change policies.
- Public access to information strengthens connections between knowledge production, knowledge sharing and decision-making, and provides people with the tools they need to play an active role in addressing climate change.
- Public participation ensures ownership by encouraging people to be more attentive to policy-making and participate in the implementation of climate policies.
- These five elements can all be strengthened through international cooperation. Governments and organizations can support each other with resources, technical expertise, ideas and inspiration for developing climate action programmes.

Table 2 • Characteristics of each ACE element

Education Education seeks to achieve profound, long-term changes in understanding, particularly among young people. It involves developing educational curricula, training of trainers and teachers and adequate pedagogies. The results of a successful programme would ultimately be a population whose deep-seated appreciation of the climate challenge leads to greater national action and commitment.	**Public access to information** Programmes to engage citizens and CSOs in addressing climate change can be improved by ensuring that information is freely available. This is crucial in order to develop and implement effective policies and to engage people actively in implementing these policies. Technologies such as databases and the internet facilitate the provision of climate information, data and statistics to all citizens.
Training Training programmes seek to spread specific practical skills that can have an immediate practical application. Examples include the ability to gather and interpret climate data, conduct inventories of national emissions, and identify climate-friendly technologies. Training is about learning by doing – individuals, communities and organizations can all benefit from ongoing learning.	**Public participation** By ensuring that people can participate effectively in climate change decision-making and implement climate mitigation and adaptation activities, governments should seek to integrate civil society perspectives and mobilize the general public. In some places, this will prompt profound changes to how political leaders and civil servants are accustomed to working and encourage people to be more attentive to policy-making.
Public awareness Many governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations and UN agencies have already launched major public awareness programmes. But there remains an enormous unmet need for more outreach. Creating a successful outreach programme that truly changes behaviour involves targeted and systematic communications.	**International cooperation** International cooperation and exchange can play a major role in strengthening ACE efforts. Many governments and relevant stakeholders need access to expertise and financial and technical resources so they can develop their own climate change programmes. All countries can benefit from sharing success stories, exchanging personnel and strengthening institutional capacity.

Source: UNESCO/UNFCCC 2016

ACE is a key cross-cutting instrument involving all levels of governance and all actors in the society in climate action and in support of all elements of mitigation and adaptation. It has the potential to provide the social and political will for action, in addition to the required scientific and technological knowhow. **ACE commitments, as non-GHG targets, can help accelerate the achievement of the GHG-related targets, and should, therefore, be included in NDC target-setting in concrete and measurable ways**.

4) What is the mandate?

At COP24 in Katowice, Poland (2018), Parties recognized the importance of ACE in the Katowice Climate Package – the Paris Agreement Work Programme – which includes "Ways of enhancing the implementation of education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information so as to enhance actions under the Paris Agreement". By this decision, Parties agreed:

> "to continue to promote the **systematic integration of gender-sensitive and participatory education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and regional and international cooperation into all mitigation and adaptation activities** implemented under the Convention, as well as under the Paris Agreement, as appropriate, **including into the processes of designing and implementing their nationally determined contributions"** (Decision 17/CMA.1, paragraph 5)

In order to raise ambition that addresses the Paris Agreement holistically, and to present an inclusive NDC, it is therefore crucial to integrate considerations of ACE into the NDC review process.

5) How to integrate ACE into NDCs?

The first step to integrate ACE into an NDC in a holistic way is to commit – if this is not already the case – **to developing a national ACE strategy and to integrating ACE into climate change and sectoral policy**. For this, it is important that all ACE and NDC focal points and education stakeholders come together, arrange knowledge transfer and engage in regular exchanges and collaboration.

ACE national strategy

The ACE strategy should be developed and implemented through a **multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder participatory process**. In order to ensure co-creation and ownership for all ACE measures from the beginning, it is important to:

- Involve key stakeholders (relevant government Ministries, regional and local authorities, businesses, workers, education and training institutions, youth organizations, inter alia) in the policy design and implementation process to foster effective governance and coherent policy coordination;
- Encourage collaboration and information-sharing between Ministries of Education and Ministries of Environment as well as other Ministries concerned with climate change and media/communications. This includes involving the Ministry of Education in climate change mitigation (CCM) and adaptation (CCA) strategies;
- Link the ACE Strategy to national **development, education and sectoral strategies and priorities and integrate ACE into core interventions regarding climate change**, including climate change laws, Long-term Emissions Reduction Strategies (LTS), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and climate financing;
- Integrate ACE into formal monitoring and reporting in relation to the NDC.

The ACE strategy and its implementation should respect, protect and fulfil human rights, particularly the rights to education, participation and access to information. They should be **gender-responsive** and pay specific attention to the needs and knowledge/skills of **vulnerable and marginalized groups** of the population, including women, children and youth, migrants, indigenous people, people with disabilities and elderly low-skilled individuals. It should also take into account the situation of workers in declining sectors as well as those most affected by the green transition (for example communities reliant on coal mining).

It is also recommended that the ACE strategy and its implementation be closely aligned with the **implementation and follow-up/review mechanisms of the Sustainable Development Goals,** the new **global framework on Education for Sustainable Development "ESD for 2030",** and the **international frameworks on access to information and public participation.**

Guide on how to develop an ACE national strategy

For a detailed step-by-step guide on how to develop an ACE national strategy and action plan, please see the "ACE: guidelines for accelerating solutions through education, training and public awareness" developed by UNESCO and the UNFCCC Secretariat (2016).

Objectives and targets

Below is a list of objectives, as well as suggested targets, for each of the six elements of ACE, that can be adapted to the specific national/regional contexts and addressed in NDCs. It is recommended to integrate these into the core NDC components rather than place them in a separate section, as strategies/means to achieve the respective mitigation and adaptation commitments.

Education

- Promote, facilitate, develop and implement formal, non-formal and informal climate education programmes that encourage climate-friendly behaviour, focusing on both mitigation and adaptation;
- Include climate change at all levels and across disciplines in both school and higher education curricula, as well as in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and adult education, addressing the entire population;
- Develop pedagogical resources/material that take into account different knowledge systems, including indigenous knowledge, as well as local languages;
- Implement quality pre-service and in-service teacher training focused on climate change.

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- By 2025, include climate learning into (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) assessment, including cognitive as well as socio-emotional and behavioural learning objectives.
- Introduce an integral inter-disciplinary climate module into all higher education degrees. By 2030, ensure that all university students have an opportunity to take this module before graduation.
- Develop an integral component on climate change mitigation and adaptation for all teacher training. By 2030, ensure that x% of teachers have completed this component.

Education, training and awareness-raising activities

Any education, training and awareness-raising activities promoted by an ACE commitment in the NDCs should be underpinned by the principles and ambitions of **Education for Sustainable Development** (ESD).

Today, traditional education and training systems (both formal and non-formal), pedagogy and content require a major transformation to accommodate the massive and complex changes that have taken place in the world over the past century, and to target the three dimensions of learning: the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimension. **ESD addresses not only learning content, but also learning outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment**. Through ESD, learners are empowered with the knowledge, skills (technical and soft), values and behaviour to achieve a sustainable, inclusive and greener future. (see: https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development)

Training

- Identify and anticipate current and future skills and training needs for the green transition, taking into account different population groups and ensuring equitable access;
- Integrate and mainstream climate change learning into the curricula of institutions that provide formal training at all levels, including professional bodies, apprenticeship programmes and trade bodies;
- Develop training materials in accordance with national circumstances, sectoral approaches and the cultural context;
- Cooperate in, promote, facilitate, develop and implement training programmes (including training of trainers) focused on climate change for groups with a key role, such as policy and decision makers, scientific, technical and managerial personnel in the public and private sectors, journalists, women, youth and community leaders at the local, national, subregional, regional, sectoral and international levels;
- Facilitate non-formal training through the engagement and participation of youth in local and national climate change events, and build the capacity of youth as future leaders.

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- By 2025, ensure that x% of government employees at a) national and b) sub-national levels have received training on CCA and CCM.
- Train x% of municipalities on proper waste management and separation, energy efficiency, water management/efficiency, green infrastructure and other climate change related issues.
- Organize x number of gender-balanced capacity-building workshops for youth organizations on skills for green jobs.
- Collaborate with private sector partners to ensure that by 2030, x% of male and female employees in key sectors of the economy (e.g. utilities, energy, transportation, food and agriculture) are trained in CCM and CCA skills and measures specific to their area of work.

Public Awareness

- Cooperate in, promote, facilitate, develop and implement inclusive public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects at the local, regional and national levels as appropriate;
- Create key messages that make it simple and fun for people to take climate action and develop and implement action campaigns to encourage people to do small, easy things that can lead to lasting change, such as reducing their personal water or electricity use;
- Encourage, by means of popular media, personal action and contributions to address climate change, support climate-friendly policies and foster behavioural changes, noting the important role that social media and digital platforms and strategies can play in this context;
- Collaborate with civil society and private sector partners to ensure wide dissemination of public awareness-raising activities and limit the spread of 'fake news' and disinformation campaigns;
- Conduct surveys to establish a baseline of public awareness, which can serve as a basis for further work and support the monitoring of the impact of activities;
- Recognize and engage youth as knowledge holders and support the participation of youth as agents of change and/or trainers in public awareness campaigns.

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- Develop and roll-out a public awareness campaign, including through national broadcasting media, explaining the components of the country's NDC and climate policy.
- Use advertising, social media and public events to advocate for behavioural changes to promote sustainable consumption, energy efficiency and other climate-friendly actions, while also outlining the economic advantages of such behavioural change. Where possible, collect sex-disaggregated data on the impact of these activities on individuals and communities.

Public Access to Information

- Guarantee public access to information and related data on good practices, climate change initiatives, policies and results of actions, so that the public can understand and respond to climate change. This effort should harness new information technologies, taking into account factors such as quality of Internet access, literacy, gender and language issues.

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- Provide comprehensive, accurate and accessible information related to climate change on a) national and b) sub-national government websites.
- Develop guidance supporting accurate reporting on climate change in news outlets.
- Develop effective regulations for transparency and full disclosure of information related to climate change by the private sector.
- Translate into appropriate languages and distribute popularized versions of key documents on climate change, including assessment reports and other reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Public Participation

- Foster the participation of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), regional and local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations, as well as the private and public sectors, in order to raise awareness and increase understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change, as well as solutions that lead to measurable outcomes;
- Create and support open and accessible multi-stakeholder platforms for public participation and dialogue engaging youth, civil society, academia and the private sector in order to reach whole-of-society consensus on climate action and NDC ambition;
- Promote social dialogue and inclusive public participation in addressing climate change and its effects and in developing adequate responses, by facilitating feedback, debate and partnership in climate change activities and in governance, noting the important role that social media platforms and strategies can play in this context;
- Strengthen the science, policy and society interface by encouraging the participation of citizens as co-producers of knowledge (citizen science).

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- Organize x number of consultations (through public meetings, workshops, online surveys, etc.) with public, private, and civil society stakeholders, including youth organizations, to advise on the development of a national ACE Strategy and its implementation.
- Establish a multistakeholder advisory committee bringing together x number of government agencies, x non-governmental organizations, and x private sector representatives to be consulted on all major CCM and CCA measures, and to support the implementation of the national ACE strategy.
- Establish a gender-balanced citizen consultation council on climate change to ensure a forum for citizen participation (including with wide participation from the private sector, civil society organizations and academia) and create working groups for specific ACE, CCM and CCA sectorial reforms.

Public participation and public access to information activities

Public participation and public access to information activities promoted by an ACE commitment in the NDCs should be underpinned by the principles and ambitions of other international frameworks such as:

- Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration
- Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
- Bali Guidelines adopted by the UNEP Governing Council as a tool to assist countries in filling gaps in national and sub-national legislation in order to facilitate broad access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters
- Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

International Cooperation

- Foster subregional, regional, sectoral and international cooperation in undertaking activities within the scope of ACE to enhance the collective ability of Parties and non-Party stakeholders to implement the Convention and the Paris Agreement;
- Document and share knowledge between countries regarding experiences, lessons learned, good practices and challenges in the implementation of ACE and promote peer-learning, so that Parties, IGOs and NGOs that have the resources to do so might effectively target their efforts at providing appropriate support;
- Develop and encourage international exchange programmes between government professionals, teachers, students and researchers with respect to training on climate change.

Examples of concrete targets:

We recommend that the above be integrated into the NDC with **specific, simple and measurable targets**. For example:

- Appoint a national focal point for ACE to reinforce direct exchange and collaboration on ACE with other ACE national focal points around the world, as well as with UNFCCC, UNESCO, UNITAR and other UN agencies, and participate in annual ACE dialogues and training opportunities for ACE focal points.
- Use existing mechanisms of collaboration to share good practices on all elements of ACE, for example during annual meetings of regional multilateral organizations.
- Organize a bilateral/multilateral annual exchange programme with x number of countries to exchange government officials working on ACE, CCA and CCM measures during a period of 6 months.

How to nominate an ACE Focal Point

The UNFCCC National Focal Point is requested to send a letter to secretariat@unfccc.int with copy to ACE@unfccc.int indicating: name of the nominee, title, institution and contact details. Once the communication is received, the newly nominated National Focal Point for ACE will be added to the network of National Focal Points for ACE.

For more information about ACE Focal Points and their terms of reference, see UNESCO/UNFCCC (2016), page 7, box 1.

International Cooperation activities

The members of the UN Alliance on Climate Change Education, Training and Public Awareness and the NDC partnership provide various online platforms, websites and networks to support countries to implement ACE.
For example:

- UNFCCC website with information on ACE and the NDC interim registry
- NDC Partnership website
- UNDP: Mission 1.5 –Global Platform for Public Participation, which provides a platform for citizens to learn about climate policy and vote on climate solutions they would like to see implemented in their country
- UNESCO Associated Schools Network and the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme
- UNESCO Resource bank for educators on the SDGs
- UN CC: Learn platform: The One UN Climate Change Learning Platform

Way ahead

In support of countries to implement ACE in the framework of their NDCs, UNESCO and UN Climate Change, in collaboration with all members of the UN Alliance, will continue their work in support of Climate Change Education, Training, Public Awareness, Public Access to Information, Public Participation and International Cooperation, including with respect to the upcoming Climate Change Conferences and the future work programme on ACE, to be adopted at COP26 in Glasgow, United Kingdom.

For any questions or comments regarding these guidelines please contact esd@unesco.org or ace@unfccc.int.

Further reading

- ILO (2019): Skills for a greener future: A global view. Based on 32 country studies [chapter 3.1.5: The role of skill development measures in NDCs, pp. 67-69]
- ILO (2019): Policy brief: Skills for a greener future: Challenges and enabling factors to achieve a just transition
- UNDP (2019): Guide to Strengthening National Climate Plans by 2020
- UNESCO (2013): Climate change in the classroom: UNESCO course for secondary teachers on climate change education for sustainable development
- UNESCO (2016): Getting climate-ready: a guide for schools on climate action
- UNESCO (2017): Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives
- UNESCO (2017): Greening technical and vocational education and training: a practical guide for institutions
- UNESCO (2018): Getting the message across: reporting on climate change and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. A handbook for journalists
- UNESCO (2019): Country progress on climate change education, training and public awareness: an analysis of country submissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- UNESCO/UNFCCC (2016): Action for Climate Empowerment: Guidelines for accelerating solutions through education, training and public awareness
- UNICEF (2012): Climate Change and Environmental Education
- UNICEF (2012): Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Education Sector. Resource Manual.
- UNICEF (2019): Are climate change policies child-sensitive? A guide for action: summary
- UNICEF/Brookings Institute/Plan International (2019): Girls' education in climate strategies: Opportunities for improved policy and enhanced action in Nationally Determined Contributions

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