

Earth Charter in Delhi Schools: One Earth, One Family

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Introduction



On the occasion of Earth Day, the Delhi Government, represented by the Honourable Chief Minister of Delhi, Smt. Sheila Dikshit, expressed its commitment to the Earth Charter's vision and launched a collaborative project with CLEAN-India (Community Led Environment Action Network).

CLEAN-India is a programme created by Development Alternatives (a leading Indian NGO and ECI Affiliate) to bring the Earth Charter to over 2,000 schools in Delhi. As part of this effort, the Earth Charter will be integrated into the school curriculum. This case study recapitulates the process that led to the "Earth Charter in Delhi Schools" project, and how it has been implemented.

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CLEAN-India evolved from a small group of teachers and students from about 10 schools, with the aim of motivating and empowering children and youth to act as catalysts of change in mobilizing community members to be environmentally responsible citizens. Currently over 60 schools are CLEAN-India members, covering the entire metropolitan area of Delhi and the adjoining cities of Noida and Gurgaon.

In 2005, CLEAN-India adopted the Earth Charter principles and developed a "Children's Earth Charter" version, with the objective of expanding the Charter's reach to our 30 NGO partners, and to thousands of children and teachers from hundreds of schools. The adapted version of the Earth Charter is available in English, Hindi and seven regional languages.⁴³

Our experience using the adapted version of the Earth Charter evolved and then generated the project, "Earth Charter in Delhi Schools," which is in the process of introducing the Earth Charter's principles to approximately 1,700 school in Delhi, in partnership with the Department of Environment and Forests of the Delhi Government. This project presents a potentially powerful opportunity for our young people to understand and analyze local and planetary (global) interconnectedness, and to learn and incorporate into their values the true strength of our country – understanding, appreciating, and caring for our natural and cultural heritage and our commitments towards upholding the respect and dignity of all our people – 'good' globalization and sustainable living.

The "Earth Charter in Delhi Schools" project is being implemented in phases. The first phase is for a period of one year (April 2007 to April 2008) and is planned to be extended in the second phase for two more years (for a total period of three years).

In phase one, we are working with 500 school teachers and are evaluating the programme and making modifications where necessary. We are also working out plans and strategies to take it to children and teachers from schools in the other states, and in the next phase, to reach out to the rest of the schools in Delhi and to other cities.

Methodological aspects

The activities envisioned for "Earth Charter in Delhi Schools" are directed to teachers and children at schools. For teachers, there are five workshops (of two days each) and five field trips planned. For children, there are seven modules that explain and promote reflection on sustainability.

Earth Charter workshops for teachers

The workshops are divided into two days. The first day is intended to sensitize and motivate the teachers to include aspects of sustainability into their teaching. The second day is intended to provide opportunities for teachers to put into practice part of the theory received on the first day, by promoting an experiential learning process.

Day One – sensitizing workshop

The specific objectives of this workshop are to introduce and articulate the principles of the Earth Charter. The group is asked to analyze one local issue and design an intervention for school students, including inputs and actions on the issue. At the end of the day the group draws up an action plan for the whole intervention.

Activities and objectives:

a. Introductory session: An ice-breaker activity, for example:

- Introduce yourself: say your name and share a symbol which represents you or your aspiration (animal, flower, or any living or non-living thing)
- Introduce your neighbour: talk with your neighbour and then introduce him/her to the audience; tell two truths and one lie about your neighbour

b. Expectations: Ask participants to write down what they expect from the workshop on a slip, and then paste the slip on a board.

c. Introduction of the concept of the Earth Charter, using a PowerPoint presentation.

⁴³ To learn more, visit: <http://www.cleanindia.in> and <http://www.devalt.org>.

d. Connection of the Local and the Planetary: The idea is to analyze a local issue to establish the interconnections between the issues at the local and global level. The participants work in groups; they take an idea from the group on a local issue, which they analyze, and then reflect on how it is related to the Earth Charter's principles. Group work is encouraged in order to increase the interaction and exchange of opinions between participants, and to allow them to find answers without relying only on the facilitator.

e. Recap Session with Energizer: Each group will briefly elucidate what issues have been identified. The aim is to check that there are no overlapping issues. Groups may be rearranged based on the issues identified.

f. From thoughts to action: The objective is to design activities pertaining to the issue based on the principles of the Earth Charter and prepare an action plan. Each group will prepare a plan with tangible outputs, and will deal with one issue, working on and integrating all the principles of the Earth Charter. Most of the principles on ecological integrity are being addressed under the CLEAN-India programme and the Eco-clubs programme of the Delhi Government. Some aspects of the Charter's other principles are dealt with in the school curriculum, but only theoretically. The teacher's modules and the students' activities therein will add practical and experiential aspects and make it more meaningful for them – helping make them active participants as well as initiators of change.

g. Presentations by the groups: As a result, one group will be constituted, which will note down the action plans to be compiled as "Delhi Schools Resolution."

Day two: field trip

Each group will undertake one small activity the next day (e.g. a community survey or a street play) to make the field trip into a greater transformative learning experience.

The field visit is related to the topic of the issue analyzed:

- the ecological integrity group could work on a biodiversity count and the land–water relationship
- the social justice group could research the access to health care of the local community
- the democracy/peace group could work on the access to information and decision-making in the community
- the rights for all group could look at overall city patterns and processes

As an example of relevant places to visit, a group dealing with waste management could visit the Asola Bhatti mines (a reclaimed mining site in the process of regeneration) and/or the Balsawa land fill site (one of the land fill sites for Delhi).

Below is a list of suggested places to visit, keeping in mind that they cover broadly all the issues of Delhi.

- Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary (reclaimed mining site)
- Yamuna Bio Diversity Park (waste land reclaimed that has a rich diversity of plants, birds, butterflies and insects)
- National History Museum (repository of some of the national historical treasures)
- Crafts Museum (master craftsmen from different parts of the country demonstrating their arts and crafts)
- Indian Parliament in session
- Rehabilitated slum colony (inhabitants of the slums on the banks of River Yamuna)

The field visits are intended to last half a day. After the visit, the groups briefly share their experiences and what they learned. It is also expected that participants provide their inputs to plan the workshops for the school children.

The first set of workshops took place in Asola Bhatti wildlife sanctuary. Teachers participating in the first workshops also had the opportunity to interact with

experts from Bombay Natural History Museum, and engaged in several activities related to the various nature trails. The teachers also interacted with forest officials and the users (for firewood and fodder) of the forest from the surrounding villages.

Activities for children – Earth Charter Modules

Seven modules – three modules on the Earth Charter’s principles and one each on biodiversity, trees, medicinal herbs, and solid waste management – are being distributed to 1,700 schools. These modules have been prepared by the CLEAN-India programme team, with input and contributions from youth from colleges in Delhi, and are serving as aid materials for teachers. A set of posters on the Earth Charter principles are also being prepared and will be used for awareness generation. Activities for generating awareness – street theatre, rallies, competitions, and exhibitions – will also be undertaken.

The following are three examples of student assignments and activities that could be carried out as part of the modules.

1. Social and Economic Justice

To address principle 11 of the Earth Charter: “Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care and economic opportunity,” children would understand the complex issues of gender equality and how inequality afflicts our society, by means of discussions and interactions. Different thought-provoking questions and exercises are used to promote critical thinking regarding gender equality, hoping that these will inspire students to proactively take small measures for ensuring equality for men and women.

Examples of exercises and questions:

1. How many among us admire a woman?
2. Are women given their due respect in your family?

3. Write down the different roles played by women in your family.
4. Create a club or group to discuss the daily violence and abuse that you or others you know are witnessing, and share what you might be able to do to improve the situation.
5. Pledge that you will not ask (or pay for) a dowry.
6. Do you feel that this problem can ultimately be addressed (solved) through literacy? Actions might include students helping educate more disadvantaged children.

2. Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace

The “Electoral Process” is an activity to reflect on the Earth Charter principle 13: “Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making and access to justice.”

The Electoral Process activity:

List all the different election-related activities and arrange them in a time sequence, beginning with the first activity and ending with the last. Some of these activities are: releasing election manifestos; counting of votes; making a voters’ list; election campaigning; declaring election results; casting of votes; ordering a re-poll; announcing election schedule; filing nomination.

Start an electoral process in your school (or in class) following some or all of the activities listed above.

Indians always feel proud of the fact that we are part of the biggest democracy in the world, but do we actually understand the democratic process? How are our representatives elected? Carrying out this activity will involve holding an election in the school and covering all the activities related to an election process. This exercise will help our youth to understand the election process; to be a

part of the whole system, and to encourage them to actually cast their votes when elections are held in their city.

3. Ecological Integrity

To reflect on Principle 5: "Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life," it has been useful to undertake field trips to sacred groves, and get children involved in activities related to these special places.

'Sacred groves' (patches of forest dedicated to local deities) are unique and distributed all over India. There are about 17,000 known sacred groves that have survived the axe of development, political turmoil and natural calamities, due in part to conservation ethics coupled with taboos and traditions. Hence, in the present context, 'sacred groves' are not merely a patch of forest, but are islands of life in desolated landscapes. They represent the past status of vegetation and biota, as well as a biotic diversity of the region.

However, the number of groves is declining as social values and religious beliefs are changing due to modernization, urbanization and the expansion of the market economy. Habitat destruction is on rise in these once socially-guarded ecosystems.

To deal with this issue, the "Earth Charter in Delhi Schools" project promotes the activity: "Adopt a heritage tree." The idea is that students adopt a heritage tree, located in a nearby sacred grove. First, the students are asked to improve their knowledge about the heritage tree by collecting information from various sources, so they learn about its religious, social and environmental significance. Second, they compile their findings into a poster, pamphlet and/or booklet and distribute them to visitors; they could also put up informational signage with permission from the authorities.

The teachers can even encourage students to initiate an awareness campaign in the area to make local people aware of the significance of their heritage tree and, in this sense, promote positive values within the students about their place in their communities and in the wider world.

Actions and results from the children's workshops

We have launched three large-scale activities in Delhi, including the Green Million, waste recycling, and Celebrating River Yamuna.

1. Green Million – A million native trees are being planted across Delhi by school children over three years.
2. Waste paper recycling saves trees, thus saving the carbon sinks and reducing pollution, and also saves water and energy. Children are also making paper using the recycling plants set up in their schools. Seventy-five schools will be part of this programme.
3. Celebrating River Yamuna – the Yamuna River is the life-line for Delhi. It is highly polluted mainly due to the untreated sewage from homes and effluents from small industries. **Celebrating River Yamuna was launched on Earth Day 2007 and included these activities:**

- The students monitored the water quality, help in the cleaning up of some stretches of the river, and spread awareness about it in their schools and communities.
- The students spoke to the priest of one of the temples on the riverbank (Ram Ghat, a place where devotees perform religious rites and immerse flowers and other 'Pooja' materials in the river). They talked about the increase in the levels of pollution in the river due to certain religious practices. Now the temple displays a board of "Do's and Don'ts" for the devotees. A cement tank is now available for the collection of flowers, and other such materials for composting, and the priest has been successful in keeping the stretch near Ram Ghat clean.

Lessons learned

This project is still in the process of being implemented; nonetheless it has achieved important political support

from high government officials in Delhi. Having this support helps the project bring about changes in the education system by encouraging the discussion of social, economic and ecological aspects of local situations in schools in an integrated way.

This support is the result of various factors. One factor is that Development Alternatives has been interacting with all stakeholders including the State and Central Governments. The activities of this organization have attracted the attention of both the political leadership and the administration. The Honourable Chief Minister has been taking a keen interest in the activities and has also participated in some of them.

Another factor is that the CLEAN-India programme has been working in Delhi schools for over a decade on various environmental issues, and is involved in projects and programmes of the Delhi Government (formulation of school Environmental Science curriculum and books; teachers' trainings; 'Bhagidari' programmes; awareness programmes; and exhibitions). Some of the CLEAN-India initiatives have influenced government policies, such as the formulation of "Greening" guidelines and a tree help line; the banning of polythene bags; and the use of natural and eco-friendly products for celebrating festivals (such as eco-friendly Holi and Diwali without firecrackers).

The capital city of Delhi has led the way for other state governments to follow with many of its initiatives. Delhi is growing at a very fast rate and many in society are facing numerous social, economic and ecological problems. We felt, therefore, that it was the right time to initiate "The Earth Charter in Delhi Schools."

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