

Michèle Sato, Luiz Augusto Passos, and Carlos Maldonado, Brazil. [A project descriptive essay on the many inspirations and applications of the Earth Charter in Mato Grosso, Brazil](#)

Mato Grosso Writes Its Earth Charter



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Sometimes we neglect our internal values in exchange for material aid. But without political foresight, dollars and international help are useless. For instance, we need to prove the viability of Extractive Reserves as an alternative to Amazonian development. In the meantime, these reserves become remote islands in a sea of misery and injustices, if the political understanding is not clear. We need to strengthen the alliance with the environmentalists without losing our own characteristics as workers who want a ecologically responsible society, where we can live with dignity, social justice, and also enjoy what wisdom, science, and technology have to offer us.

Chico Mendes

Conceived in the utopia of civil society, the Earth Charter remained a draft for a long period, so that regional interests could re-write it and place it in the unique context of each beating heart of this immeasurable ecosphere. Thus, in the Brazilian Central West Region, Mato Grosso claimed a politico-educational reality of the Earth Charter because, being aware of the conflicting sides among subjects, it bet on the pedagogy of transformation. As it paid attention to plurality, many times silent, we recognize that, as with all propositions, our Earth Charter was somewhat fragile, as well as embedded with virtues which forced us to place the Charter next to conceptual, methodological, and

axiological endeavors dedicated to environmental education.

Our first steps did not begin at the International Conference of the Earth Charter (1998), but with the dialogues of its preparatory process, with the collective organization among various institutions and players who enable it to be a project for all. Thus, our efforts attempted to dialogue on the religious, ethical, political, artistic, conceptual or tactical differences, and on our willingness to build propositions that could express our desires to change life – reinventing passion. This task has not been easy; and perhaps our greatest difficulty resides in overcoming the dichotomy society-nature, which carries a strong illuminist influence which, to this day, continues to exist. It impacts different concepts and attitudes among the players who work with environmental education, and their desires to reaffirm the Earth Charter as one of the political platforms of great complexity. Another challenge was to insert ourselves in the international context recognizing that humankind is a stage for conflicts and tensions, and that there was never the intent to eliminate differences, since we are aware that the biggest challenge we face is the difficult task of mutual co-existence (Passos and Sato, 2002).

To overcome the divorce between nature and culture, between environment and people, between state and nation, there is an on-going dynamic in the heart of Latin America, and in the center of Brazil We understand that the clarity of the

Earth Charter is not isolated from society, that it reflects its ideology-producing trends, many times reaffirming merely economic development models. The movement is slow and does not bring any explosive revolution. But certainly, the Earth Charter's impact is long-lasting because we are fighting with fervor against isolation, dialectically transforming and being transformed, and, in particular, looking for altering the terrible "integrating-disintegrating" process, which in the majority of the cases only brings pain to the dramatic wish to change life toward social inclusion and environmental justice.

The Mato Grosso Earth Charter does not represent a hope that humankind becomes sensitive of its impact on nature, but rather that it has multi-referential political bases, which insistently believe that the ecological movement cannot continue to be at the margin's edge of economic and social issues (Botkin, 1992). The emphasis in the "Sustainable Development" discourse may represent a strong financial bias of nations, bringing the "myth of the victory of good against evil, of the strong and able against the weak and mediocre, and above all reinforcing a manichaest and positivist approach to reality" (Rummert, 1998, p. 10), increasing a hegemonic world behind the globalization discourse, and above all obfuscating the Earth Charter's importance.

Thus, in Mato Grosso, the Earth Charter movement is allied with that of environmental education in a political manner to stimulate the collective, without promoting competition which leads to social atomization, and in a critical ability to accept conflicts in a field of uncertainties, and having solidarity as a commitment of its participating members. We recognize the existence of a vast field of multiple types of knowledge, which are not confined to academia. We also promote social inclusion, which has been wasted principally by private sectors. We give

preference to uniting efforts with all players interested in the movement. The "new" discourse, which in the name of reform hides an exclusionary agenda, brings intolerance with popular values and local culture survival, and obviously promotes the increase of consumerism, particularly in the "techno-globalization" era and the standardization of the human civilization.

We live in a time of separation from the State, exactly in a moment when we need to redefine the State. Discontinuity of individual and collective projects, based on competitiveness and on exclusion of solidarity, affects the construction of sustainable societies and not of sustainable development. Thus, we reject competition and the retreat of democracy, looking instead for the political support of the relationship between society and nature, and, above all, we are immersed in the project of communion with the sixteen principles contained in the Earth Charter.

However, a great question remains in the tense and dialogical-reality which is at the core of the world's and universe's movement. Is this question sufficiently addressed in the Earth Charter's text? Sometimes it does not appear so. At times, the Earth Charter still reveals a predominantly lyrical, wishful point of view, missing the understanding of the contradictions and the ruptures inherent to life, to the movement's status, to the energy of development and change.

Existing trends in the core of the Earth Charter's movement represent a very complex whole. Any claim to characterize them, as we try to do now, is arbitrary because we are inclined to do it in a uniform manner. There are, however, trends that show up frequently. One of them is the opinionated outcry for peace without taking into account that humankind is a stage for conflicts and disagreements. Another is the reproduction of the hegemonic discourse on "sustainable development." Other contradictions may exist, but these two are enough as they

regrettably reflect the reactionary approach to cultural matters, the adoption of an incomprehensible static attitude on matters of dynamic movements, particularly pertaining to the disrespect of the various manifestations of human society. This preoccupation may be responsible for the presence of false poets, mere pamphleteers, handlers defending life, or artists who lack any understanding of the meaning of the cycles of life and death.

Our approach, in this sense, does not imply realization and perfection. We believe that a continuous review of concepts and approaches is necessary, using epistemological honesty and a firm, political purpose in opposition to those who preach pre-established concepts. The dominant players want to push for an ideal psychological type based on life's universal values – all this with the purpose of making the Earth Charter just another experience, showing trends and solutions and controlling the esthetical content. We emphasize that there are very beautiful things in its principles, but if one does not see the criticism, personalities may mask the greatness of the movement which, like everything else, has progress and limitations.

Wouldn't this also be the value of the traditional education? Is school apt to face uncertainties, to risk facing surprises or accepting diversity? The liberating educator must be a revolutionary by education (Freire, 2000), gifted with an almost magic power to tear down all acceptable trends and seek freedom. A dream education must invade art, philosophy, science, and technique. It must overcome the resistance of the times, their current disciplines with closed ranks, and strangling logic. It must overcome the hegemonic standardization which has prevented the development of educational diversity (Passos and Sato, 2002).

It is not possible to build an ecological conscience divorced from the dramatic interaction of opposites and of

metamorphosis, which dizzily circulates in the entire universe (Santos, 2001). The living and dynamic dialogue depends on a productive, creative, and transforming esthetics which will implement, divulge, and make the Earth Charter's policies adherent and welcoming.

The Earth Charter, when we understand that the great synthesis of its principles is based upon respect without borders with all forms of life, will demand, as a trade-off, the banishment of all unnecessary and prolonged cruelty and suffering, espousing an esthetic sensibility that is positive and dynamic.

The Earth Charter, when proposing sentiments of compassion and understanding with the community of life and geared toward tolerance, rights, and freedom, seeks to cement among co-responsible people a culture of peace. In this endeavor, it supposes a continuous and daily war against premature, pointless, unnecessary death and the demolition of totalitarian and condescending paradigms. It needs to destroy all presumption of perfection and to open itself to all types of difference, seeking knowledge in wisdom and courage to immerse itself in life's events (Passos and Sato, 2002). It is necessary to create a "conviviality" (Morin, 2000) of a new esthetics which will be conducted from the point of view of recreating "feelings" and types of joy and pleasure, personal and collective, which nowadays are misinterpreted daily by the cultural industry. Joy trails all values, without co-responsibility for its consequences. The implementation of the Earth Charter's principles also assumes a personal and collective re-education, favoring non-conformity with the guidelines of collusion.

Having addressed these points of view, we believe that the Earth Charter must be at the technical corners of each segment of society, and in particular at schools. It should also be in the difficult aspects of collective works, in the expressions of students and the entire school community. The relevant Earth

Charter esthetics must defend the joy that comes from gestures, symbols, and feelings which realize and reaffirm the ethical-praxiological decision of remembering, expressing, and living in tension together and in solidarity with all.

To be in the world is inevitably to witness its barbarism, as a volcano that erupts in the gulf, following the tyranny of a discourse that does not allow dissensions but imposes only one way. To look at the world in this manner is not only to understand it externally but also to care and protect its core. This is the view that emerged from the Earth Charter, stimulating our capacity to defend life in the waves of rebellious movements against the political castration of a development-driven economy. We may not have undertaken an explosive revolution but the influence of our praxis pulsates slowly and beautifully on the engagement of the ones who not only want to follow destiny but also want to guide changes.

As we conclude, we do not pretend to be definitive on or to represent a replicable paradigm of the universal method of the Earth Charter. These are thoughts lived in the interior of Mato Grosso life, whose texture thus discloses that our thinking, and our remarks and our poetry care for the words and essences of the existence of beings. To re-experience and recreate the senses is a continuous task for those who reveal a pattern by pulling the loose threads of the yarn, and by including others who are not used to embroidering old clothes made by others' hands. The continuous act of separating threads and of weaving represents the inexorable movement of the past, present, and future. For us to sustain does not mean to freeze ideas – on the contrary, it means to transform them in a surrealist metamorphosis. An international network for the Earth Charter may be a dimension of the complexity, which is weaved and understood through a pattern of multiple nuances coloring environmental education, subject to equilibrium and pauses. The rhythm is the constructed

time, often escaping through our hands, but built on the eternal courage for taking chances to write a charter of ecological and cultural utopias – an Earth Charter. ●

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