

Alberto Cárdenas Jiménez and Mateo A. Castillo Ceja, Mexico. **A project descriptive essay on building participation in sustainable development as it relates to Principle 3**

The Earth Charter in Mexico: Actions to Advance Toward Democratic Societies that are Just, Participatory, Sustainable, and Peaceful



Mateo A. Castillo Ceja is President of the Ecological State Council of Michoacan and, with many others, has instigated true processes of social participation in the development of environmental public policies for a sustainable Mexico. He is an altruistic person who takes part in the world humanitarian movement. He is considered a national expert in the implementation of local Agenda 21. He has been a representative of civil society in Mexico in many forums and international summits. Castillo is the main developer in Mexico of the Earth Charter and the founder of the National Secretariat. He was awarded the Citizen Merit Prize in 2003, and in 2004 he received honorary mention in the National Prize for Ecological Merit.



Alberto Cárdenas Jiménez served as head of the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources from 2003-2005. He has extensive experience as a public servant. In 2001, he worked as the first General Director of the National Forest Commission. From 1995-2001, he was Governor of the State of Jalisco. During his term, he carried out an integral reform of the executive, legislative, judicial branches; and municipal and electoral reform achieving a new state constitution. Also, he initiated the Regionalization Program as a strategy for sustainable, balanced, and just development to confront the problems and challenges of poverty, globalization, and inequality. From 1992-1994, he was Municipal President of

Ciudad Guzmán in Jalisco. His political trajectory has taken place within the *Partido Acción Nacional* (Party of National Action) as a member of the National Executive Committee, Secretary of Studies of the Municipal Executive Committee in Ciudad Guzmán, and head of internal and external electoral processes.

To build a democratic society that is just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful, and is founded on respect for universal human rights, economic and social justice, and the culture of peace, as stated in the third Principle of the Earth Charter, it is absolutely necessary to protect and conserve the environment and natural resources and to acknowledge their vital importance for the security and development of nations. In this twenty-first century, the people of the world cannot ignore that natural resources are essential to sustain life. Not to recognize their social, economic, and political value allows for their destruction and limits the expansion of national and global development.

The natural richness of our planet is our life insurance in a changing world. Humanity's well-being depends on the preservation of all ecological systems. In order to build a world of peace, freedom and dignity for all, we need fertile soil, healthy oceans, and clean water and air.

Mexico acknowledges that the freedom of action of those of us who use and

enjoy this richness is conditioned by the needs of tomorrow's societies. Besides owning, administering and using natural resources, the essential duty of sustainability is that we have the responsibility to prevent environmental damage and conserve conditions so that future generations have the possibility to enjoy a healthy environment.

Mexico, in its megadiversity, constitutes a national and world treasure. Thus, towards the end of the year 2000, the President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, declared water and forests as matters of national security. Since then, Mexico's environmental sector has focused on stopping and reversing ecosystems degradation while restoring biodiversity and natural resources, emphasizing that environmental costs should be reflected in the social, environmental and economic value of the services provided by the ecosystems.

Environmental national policies made a qualitative jump forward by prioritizing the sustainable management of water and forests, and converging public policies in order to promote sustainable development. The new environmental policy is based on internal management that applies planning and promotional instruments, supported on a constantly updated legal framework. These axes of the new environmental policy correspond to the principles of the Earth Charter: The inclusion of sustainability criteria in national developmental policies, participation and social shared responsibility, the strengthening of state

Principle 3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

environmental management, the fight against environmental impunity, and a scrupulous adherence to the law and accountability.

Different institutions in the federal government responsible for formulating and realizing the economic and social policies in the country have taken on specific commitments in order to progress towards a sustainable development for our country.

This national effort, headed by the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), has been fruitful. We signed the agreement for the Coastal and Marine Ecological Legislation of the California Gulf, with the participation of the following Secretariats: Tourist, Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing and Food, Marine, Communications and Transport, Environmental and Natural Resources and Administration, as well as the governments of the states of Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit. This process for Land Ecological Legislation allows for and assures the incorporation of local knowledge and active participation of local communities in the design of the policies for use and usefulness of the land and natural resources.

We have reoriented federal resources towards areas of social and environmental concern, such as Protected Natural Areas where indigenous peoples live, to encourage productive reconversion to sustainable activities that will improve conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, at the same time that they foster local and regional development. An example of such an effort is the development of ecotourism services by the National Commission of Protected Natural Areas and the Tourist Secretariat. We created a National Program for Energy and the Environment through which the Secretariats for Energy and Environment and Natural Resources designed the basis to foster development of clean energy sources for the country.



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Education is a fundamental means to promote sustainable development. That is why Mexico was the first country to sign its commitment to the United Nations initiative which declared 2005-2015 as the Decade for Sustainable Development Education. Since 2001, SEMARNAT has encouraged the establishment of a National Strategy for Environmental Education for Sustainable Development, with the support of Environmental Education State Plans, Training and Educational Communication for Sustainable Development. By mid-2005, we had accomplished twenty-four State Plans plus an environmental education program for the metropolitan area of Mexico City – all products of consensual agreements with organized civil society, reached in workshops with public participation, and emphasizing the Earth Charter as an educational tool in the plans.

In Mexico we have also made important advances in the consolidation of profound transformations towards a development of the political and institutional life of the country. The results are encouraging in terms of society's expression and participation, which offers ever more mature proposals on the priorities of our nation.

In terms of strengthening the institutions of government, changes are also visible. The process of governance recognizes the importance of societal participation in the search for and generation of consensus for adequate public policies in society, the economy, and the environment. We have created and strengthened consultation and participation processes for our society; today we have a Transparency and Governmental and Public Information Law that provides society with opportune and true information.

Knowledge of the Earth Charter motivates social participation and strengthens advancement efforts towards institutional and legal development. In order to advance and the mandates of the Earth Summit and initiate the agreements of Agenda 21, Mexico promotes democratic processes for social participation through a National Consulting Council for Sustainable Development (CCDS) and five regional ones. The main objective of these institutions is to procure ample and informed participation in decision-making and problem-solving related to the environment and development.

The first draft of the Earth Charter

arrived at the CCDS in 1997 as it was looking for consensus in its elaboration. From that time on, the National Council committed itself to the vision of a democratic country – just, sustainable, and peaceful.

The President of the Republic, Vicente Fox, during his intervention at the World Summit on Sustainable Development that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, announced his commitment to support and disseminate the Earth Charter and its principles, and fundamental values for sustainable development. When at this Summit, the Earth Charter Initiative presented the Type II Partnership proposal “Educating for Sustainable Living with the Earth Charter,” the Mexican government, through SEMARNAT, underlined the relevance of considering the Earth Charter as an educational tool to develop a better understanding about those critical choices that humanity has to make and the urgent necessity to commit to a sustainable way of life.

Among the results derived during the Summit of Johannesburg, we reached accords between the CCDS and several countries and nongovernmental organizations to implement Type II Partnership. In compliance with these agreements, the CCDS has accepted the task of developing a national strategy to disseminate and consolidate the principles and values contained in the Earth Charter, with the purpose of offering education and training to local communities and authorities on the fundamental principles of sustainable development and its incorporation in the decision making process.

In Mexico, the Earth Charter is integrated in community training and development programs as a guide to introduce sustainable development. One of the main indicators of support of the program is signing the endorsement whereby communities, local authorities, universities and/or companies, ultimately recognize the Earth Charter as an important ethical point of reference

for sustainable development, and commit to use it as a guide and ethical framework in decision making, in plans and policy development and as an educational tool for sustainable development. To date, twenty endorsements from municipal presidencies have been attained, fifteen from the main academic institutions in the country, three national nongovernmental organizations and one private organization dedicated to ecosystems management based on ecotourism.

The integration of the National Committee for the Earth Charter complies with one of the commitments made by the CCDS. This committee was formed with representatives of the five Regional Councils for Sustainable Development, the National Council and other institutions directly connected with the project, such as SEMARNAT, through the Center of Education and Training for Sustainable Development, Secretariat for Public Education and various nongovernmental organizations. At the same time, thirty-two states of Mexico continue advancing the national project of the Earth Charter and the Type II Partnership “Educating for Sustainable Living with the Earth Charter.”

With efforts in the areas of education, training, communication, information and attention to local communities, the Secretariat has achieved encouraging results by using the Earth Charter as an educational tool and basic guide in the design of workshops directed to raising consciousness of the principles and values of sustainability. . At the same time, the first “Degree on Environmental Education, Communication and Information with the Earth Charter,” was implemented, which culminated with the development of a Masters Degree in “Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter” within the Framework of the Decade for Sustainable Development Education.

As part of the effort to make all Mexicans aware of this contribution to sustainability, justice and world peace,

to date more than thirty thousand copies of the Earth Charter (adapted for Mexican culture) have been distributed, as well as electronic dissemination via the Internet. In this sense, in a collaborative effort with different educational institutions and nongovernmental organizations, versions have been created for children and youths, as well as translations to the main indigenous languages in the country, such as Purépecha and Maya. A new outreach effort will translate the Earth Charter into Braille so that the visually impaired can also learn of our commitment.

With the conviction that change is possible if we act locally and globally in favor of a more just, sustainable and peaceful world, we recognize that the principles and values expressed in the Earth Charter play a relevant role in the construction of democratic and participatory societies. We recognize that, meaningful social participation entails coordination and compromise of shared responsibility before confronting and resolving environmental problems, actively intervening in the fight against poverty, achieving quality education, gender equality, and respect and recognition of traditional knowledge.

This effort must be congruent with the values of democracy, peace and social justice. We are convinced that humanity can achieve the vital mission of taking care of our planet and can guarantee a shared social existence through solidarity and tolerance. ●