

Razeena Waiget, South Africa. [A project descriptive essay on using the Earth Charter in the national curriculum and in national park staff training as it relates to Principle 14](#)

## South African Initiatives that Draw on the Earth Charter



**Razeena Waiget** takes a keen interest in monitoring trends, shifts, and debates on environment and education, including policies and imple-

mentation issues, and has been a central role player in environment and education national developments in South Africa for a number of years. She holds academic and professional qualifications in the areas of botany, zoology, ecology, education and a PhD degree in Environmental Education. Dr. Waiget was Environmental Adviser to the previous Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal for four years. Her work in the Ministry of Education included establishing the National Environmental Education Programme (NEEP), which resulted in environment being recognised as a key issue in all education and training programmes. She is currently the Executive Director, People and Conservation at South African National Parks. In both these two positions Razeena has drawn on the Earth Charter to strengthen the values dimension of the programmes that she has been implementing.

**T**oday, most South Africans value the privileges of living in a country with a very high regard for human rights, which are enshrined in a Constitution that permeates all policies and legislation. It is difficult to believe that only a decade ago, the majority of South Africans were disadvantaged by a

myriad of injustices that included a lack of access to natural resources, adverse impacts of environmental degradation, and unhealthy work and living areas which alienated most people from the environment.

Over the past ten years as the country grappled with the birth of a new democracy and the formulation of policies and legislation, the relationship between social justice and ecological sustainability became clearer, so too did the connectedness between sustainable development and care for natural resources. Linking environmental issues to human rights and social justice, and incorporating these into our Constitution, signaled a national commitment to environmental protection, for which environmental education is crucial. Environmental education is critical to achieve environmental and ethical awareness, and to develop the values, attitudes, skills, and behaviour to change the basic relationships that people have with the Earth and with each other. Briefly discussed here are two environmental education projects, located within the Ministry of Education and South African National Parks respectively, which draw on the values and principles of the Earth Charter.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in South Africa in 2002, several participating South African environmental educators recognized the Earth Charter as a means to incorporate the values and principles that translated the goals of our young democracy into

environmental education endeavors. Included were staff members involved in the National Environmental Education Programme for General Education and Training (NEEP-GET), who embarked on a process to employ the principles outlined in the Earth Charter into curriculum supporting activities. The curriculum, which underscores human rights, inclusivity, and a healthy environment, aspires to develop environmentally literate, active, competent, and committed citizens. The Earth Charter proved to be a very useful mechanism in the NEEP-GET programme to develop the values dimension that is often a neglected component in environmental education endeavours. The principles and values of the Earth charter were integrated into all four components of the NEEP-GET, namely curriculum policy, materials resource development, professional development, and school-based implementation.

The values and principles outlined in the Earth Charter are also being integrated into environmental education programmes in South African National Parks (SANParks) over the past two years. SANParks, after 1994, has undergone major changes with regard to philosophy, policy, and organisational structure to reflect the new political, economic, and social realities of South Africa. Two years ago, SANParks established the Directorate of People and Conservation, as one of the three lead Divisions in the organisation, to further a “people-centred” approach to



© SAMISAM

conserving South Africa’s natural and cultural heritage. The goal of the People and Conservation Directorate is to enable people to take responsibility for the conservation of our national heritage and contribute to the socio-economic development of neighbouring park communities. In essence, People and Conservation ensures that SANParks deliver on a people-centred conservation and tourism mandate.

Through the environmental education projects and programmes, staff strive to develop a conservation ethic by responding to environmental issues in ways that produce mutual benefits for people and parks. The programmes further aspire to enhance access for learners and teachers from disadvantaged backgrounds, by enhancing their access to South African National Parks. Concomitantly, the environmental education programme provides learners and teachers the opportunities to expand their learning environment in a National Park; for many of our disadvantaged learners, this entails a first-time point of access to some of our most prized national assets.

The Earth Charter forms an overarching framework for school teachers and National Parks staff to develop a cadre

of educators, learners, and their communities that will respect and value our national heritage. The values are contributing to mould students and programme participants from different heritages together, and encapsulate what South Africans have desired for generations - a non-racial, non-sexist society based on equality, freedom, and social justice. Through engaging with the principles and values outlined in the Earth Charter, programmes of value allow the talent of the nation’s youth, in all its diversity, to thrive and flourish. ●

Principle 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.