

Educating for a Sustainable Lifestyle with the Earth Charter; *collaborative project, COSTA RICA*

Background

In Costa Rica, several organizations, universities, and government bodies have been working with the Earth Charter Initiative for a number of years. In November 2000, the Earth Charter was formally presented to the President of Costa Rica. In October 2001, the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Education of Costa Rica declared the Earth Charter to be an initiative of public interest, and affirmed their intention to incorporate it in their respective ministry's activities. In 2003, The Ministry of Public Education in Costa Rica determined that 'values' should be a cross-cutting axis throughout the educational system in the country, with four specific themes under this area to be addressed in primary and secondary education. One of these themes is labelled "Environmental Culture for Sustainable Development" which carries with it a number of sub-themes. The Earth Charter has been included as one of these sub-themes.

Given this broad-based support for the Earth Charter Initiative in Costa Rica, the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014), and the need for didactic materials on the subject, a collaborative effort was put in place to seek funds, develop and distribute educational materials based on the Earth Charter.

Aim

The general aim was to contribute to the promotion and understanding of values and



Cover of Teacher's Guide

principles of sustainability in public schools as means to achieve sustainable development practices and a better quality of life.

In order to accomplish this general aim, the project specifically planned to develop a teacher's guidebook and two student resources (a workbook and a planner) to facilitate the implementation of the "Environmental Culture for Sustainable Development" transversal theme decreed by the Minister of Education. The educational materials were developed for primary schools based on the Earth Charter under the title, "*Educating for a sustainable lifestyle with the Earth Charter*".

training module was developed in collaboration with the National University. The Earth Charter Secretariat led a 'train the trainers' workshop within the Ministry of Education. In addition to this, a similar 'train the trainers' workshop was run at the 'Fundacion Omar Dengo', a respected educational NGO that works with a large number of public schools in the country.

Funding

The Japanese Embassy in Costa Rica funded the design and reproduction of the materials while the development of the content was an in-kind contribution of the Earth Charter Secretariat and its partner organizations. The teacher-training workshops were also provided as an in-kind contribution by the partners.

Results

The results of this project is a valuable set of didactic materials – two books and an planner – designed specifically for the Costa Rican curriculum, which offer important theoretic and practical information to work with the theme of sustainable development in primary schools. These materials provide important resources for the implementation of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Over 35,000 books for teachers, 100,000 for students and 15,000 planners were printed and distributed in Costa Rica public schools throughout the country in early and mid 2005.

While a formal evaluation of the project has yet to be conducted, the comments received from teachers during the training process regarding the materials have very positive. In fact, there was clearly a major need for didactic resources in this area.

Conclusion

A few critical success factors have been identified that allowed this national project to be implemented successfully:

- The number of engaged partners collaborating on the development of the materials allowed for a better product and also commitment to ensure the needed teacher training took place.
- The stamp of approval of the Ministry of Education was critical.
- The fact that these materials were developed keeping in mind the existing curriculum of the Costa Rican education system, allowed them to be resources welcomed by teachers rather than an 'add on'.
- The link with the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was motivational and also helped secure funding for the project.
- Ideally, there will be the possibility of adapting these materials for usage in other countries, regionally or beyond, especially given the backdrop of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Sources:

This case was drawn from the proposals submitted to the Japanese Embassy in Costa Rica as well as accompanying progress reports.