REPORT

International Forum

Finding Synergies and Building Bridges
Reorienting Education towards Sustainable Development, Sustainable Consumption and Global Citizenship

Under the framework of the UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development and the Earth Charter

Co-organized by Earth Charter International and the University for Peace in collaboration with UNESCO, UNEP, and UNDP

20 March 2015

This year, 2015, is special for the Earth Charter global network, because it is the 15th Anniversary of the launch of the Earth Charter. To celebrate, the ECII Secretariat organized the forum: “Finding Synergies, Building Bridges: Reorienting education towards sustainable development, sustainable consumption, and global citizenship”. The main objective was to differentiate and compare three interrelated United Nations education initiatives to clarify concepts, highlight each initiative’s respective importance, and identify common underlying values, synergies, and possible areas of collaboration. In addition, the discourse attempted to identify how the Earth Charter can further contribute to the process of clarifying values and be employed as an integrated ethical framework for these initiatives. The education initiatives discussed were: education for sustainable development, whose efforts have been coordinated by UNESCO; education for sustainable consumption, coordinated by UNEP; and global citizenship education, an initiative coming from the UN Secretary General’s office in coordination with UNESCO.

This one-day event took place on March 20th at the Earth Charter Education Center located on the University for Peace campus in Costa Rica. Approximately 120 participants attended the Forum. It consisted of four sessions with panelists’ presentations and interaction with participants through questions and answers.
Session 1 - Introductions and welcome

Mirian Vilela, Executive Director, Earth Charter International
Francisco Rojas Aravena, Rector, University for Peace
Yoriko Yasukawa, Resident Representative UNDP
Pilar Álvarez-Laso, Director UNESCO Central America and Mexico
Alicia Vargas, Vice Minister, Ministry of Education, Costa Rica

In her opening remarks, Mirian Vilela reminded the audience about the historical significance of this year, “2015 is a promising year, as a new development agenda around sustainability will be agreed to by the United Nations General Assembly, and a new Education Agenda will be also launched”. In this context, and considering the different education efforts around sustainability such as those mentioned above, this Forum offered the opportunity for dialogue to learn from these education initiatives, find common underlying values, and clarify the kind of education we want, Mrs. Vilela related.

On behalf of the University for Peace, Francisco Rojas welcomed the participants and exhorted them to think about the type of education needed to promote a sense of global citizenship that not only understands global challenges but also tries to be part of the solution. Promoting this type of citizenship requires education that puts values at the center.

Yoriko Yasukawa also stressed the importance of this forum’s topic as pertinent in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, as the international community will adopt a series of sustainable development goals that will guide civil society actions and countries’ development plans until 2030. These 17 goals, said Mrs. Yasukawa, have been drafted in a more open and democratic way than previous efforts, and they aim to integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects to fight inequality and exclusion, protect the environment, and combat climate change, among other issues. The difference with the millennium development goals is that the present goals are applicable to all countries, and the vision is to transform societies to become more just, peaceful, and safe, and to revitalize the UN mission around these goals.

Education is key to achieving these goals, and, in recognition of education’s importance, the UN Secretary General is calling for a global citizenship education, an education that helps everyone see her or his life in connection to others and to natural surroundings, an education that helps people respect all forms of life and the differences among people and the natural world, said Mrs. Yasukawa. This is a vast challenge when more than 100 million children are out of the school system globally (47,000 children in Costa Rica only).
“We live in an era of cynicism”, said Pilar Alvarez-Laso, “and it is not the first time this has occurred in history, a time when banality and sensationalism are the norm. It is also an era of ethical numbness, when people do not care for what happen to others”. In response, the post-2015 development agenda offers opportunities for bringing about transformations and great possibilities can emerge as these goals will be supported by the majority of countries in the world. UNESCO is taking advantage of this moment and is making efforts to connect multiple education efforts towards sustainability. Education for sustainable development is not a programme but a paradigm; current problems cannot be solved with the mindset that led us to those problems.

Education systems need to change, as current education models are promoting unsustainable ways of living. Education for sustainable development is committed to promoting these changes, starting with teachers.

Alicia Vargas expressed the Costa Rican Government’s interest in promoting a sense of new citizenship that understands and connects with the global but acts and is grounded in the local, offering the skills and empowerment to deal with those global and local challenges. Another important axis of work is outreach to families and communities, promoting this sense of citizenship outside school.

The harmonization of social and economic development, considering the importance of protecting the environment, continues to be vital for Costa Rica Government’s development plan. Education is the means to empower people to make informed decisions that support this vision of a harmonized development model, and to creating more just and equitable societies with more environmental sustainability in the framework of cultural diversity and environmental ethics.

Session 2 – Dialogue among education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, and education for sustainable consumption

Moderator: Kartikeya Sarabhai, Director, Center for Environment Education, India and ECI Council Co-Chair

Adriana Zacarias, UNEP’s Sub-programme on Resource Efficiency and Sustainable Consumption and Production

Ricardo Martinez Brenes, UNESCO Regional Office

Cruz Prado, Universidad La Salle, Costa Rica
To start a dialogue on these different education initiatives, it was important to clarify each of them. Hence, this session aimed at sharing the basic elements and objectives of education for sustainable consumption, for sustainable development, and for global citizenship.

Adriana Zacarías talked about UNEP’s actions promoting sustainable consumption and production, which are part of the [10 Year UN Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP)]. “Why is it important to change our patterns of consumption and production?” asked Mrs. Zacarias. “Basically, because we live in a wasteful and consumerist society, where 80% of the products that are produced worldwide end up in the trash after their first use or after six months of use. There are islands made of plastic in the oceans, we are polluting water and air, the foundations for life on Earth”. The challenge is enormous, Mrs. Zacarias stated, therefore it is important to build global alliances to change our patterns of consumption and production. The challenge is how to achieve our aspirations using fewer resources.

One of the sustainable development goals that will be part of the post 2015 development agenda refers to promoting sustainable consumption and production. This goal is reflected in the 10YFP, which consists of a series of programmes that promote specific actions on the following topics: Sustainable Public Procurement; Consumer Information; Sustainable Tourism; Sustainable Lifestyles and Education; Sustainable Buildings and Construction; and Sustainable Food Systems.

UNEP collaborates with UNESCO in the Sustainable Lifestyles and Education programme, promoting a change in paradigm that includes sustainability in education experiences. This change in paradigm should take into account traditional and indigenous values that are close to the vision of sustainability.

Ricardo Martínez shared some general ideas about education for sustainable development and how UNESCO has been promoting this initiative’s objectives, first coordinating the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that concluded in 2014, and now coordinating the Global Action Programme on ESD. “Education alone cannot bring the changes we want to see in the world, but without it, they won’t be possible at all”, he said.

For the new Education Agenda of UN agencies, which will be launched at the World Education Forum in May 2015, there has been debate on having influence at all education levels, from early childhood to higher education, and to not focus only on education coverage but also on quality.

UNESCO is incorporating education for sustainable development and global citizenship education in its activities, as both have similar objectives and aim for a transformative pedagogy. This transformation requires changing curricula, doing extensive teacher-training on sustainable development and global
citizenship, and generating changes in the infrastructure that is in many cases not conducive to practicing sustainability.

As an educator and researcher, **Cruz Prado** has been working and writing on the new pedagogy that is focused on learning, rather than on education and passing on information. Within this topic, she brought some conceptual elements for discussion to the session. She referred to Eco Pedagogy as a proposal that helps to embrace today’s complex existence, to move away from a linear, simplistic, and mechanistic way of seeing the world to one that is more holistic and ecological, a paradigm shift that could help societies live in harmony with other forms of life, and with the Earth.

Educating for sustainability is not about creating education programs, but doing paradigmatic and epistemological reforms, introducing a new form of education that promotes different values, dreams, and behavior. It requires a pedagogy that enhances the importance of living experiences, an ecological, spiritual, and cosmic consciousness, that promotes a systemic view of life and collaboration, and acknowledges that the current crisis is not about the individuals but about values that society promotes. That is why it is important to work on the individuals’ values to bring about changes in society. Mrs. Prado explained that she has been practicing these pedagogical elements in the Doctoral Program on Education in La Salle University.

**Session 3 – Looking at conceptual synergies among initiatives with a systemic approach. Challenges, opportunities, and common values**

*Keynote speech “Education and systems thinking” Fritjof Capra, Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California*

*Group discussion led by Oscar Motomura, Amana-Key Group, Brazil*

**Fritjof Capra** started by highlighting the great challenge of our time, which is to build and nurture sustainable communities. “A sustainable community must be designed in such a way that it does not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life”, he said. During his speech, Mr. Capra talked about the importance to understand how nature sustains life, and that this should be an important focus of education initiatives.
He referred to his latest book, “The system’s view of life”, in which he offers a grand synthesis of this new understanding of life, bringing the notions of systems thinking to highlight the interconnections between living beings and their environment. “Evolution is no longer seen as a competitive struggle for existence, but rather as a cooperative dance in which creativity and the constant emergence of novelty are the driving forces. And with the new emphasis on complexity, networks, and patterns of organization, a new science of qualities is slowly emerging. I have called this new science "the systems view of life" because it involves a new kind of thinking — thinking in terms of relationships, patterns, and context. In science, this way of thinking is known as "systems thinking," or "systemic thinking."

Mr. Capra mentioned that ecoliteracy (related to ecopedagogy) is crucial for designing sustainable communities, therefore these skills should be incorporated not only in formal education settings, but also in non-formal and informal settings, where politicians, engineers, and others learn about the ecological principles that are the basis for life on Earth. The following are principles that he thinks everyone should know as they are fundamental facts of life:

1. matter cycles continually through the web of life;
2. the energy driving the ecological cycles flows from the sun;
3. diversity assures resilience;
4. life did not take over the planet by combat but by partnerships and networking.

He said, “In a nutshell, nature sustains life by creating and nurturing communities. No individual organism can exist in isolation.”

He emphasized that sustainability is not about sustaining the status quo but about sustaining life. Systems thinking can help humanity to create solutions for the unsustainability problems we are facing, and he offered examples of how this can be done. For example, promoting organic farming can help to solve several problems: human health (people become ill from pesticides consumption); climate change (promoting a carbon rich soil will absorb more carbon from the atmosphere); employment (creates more jobs than conventional agriculture). He mentioned the good practice of building organic gardens in schools as a way for children and youth to experiment with the ecological principles that underpin life.

Mr. Capra’s full speech can be found here.

Following Mr. Capra, Oscar Motomura presented several challenges and questions for discussion in groups.

One challenge is the awareness of the direction that present education efforts are leading towards. In the past, education’s main objective was to form better citizens, now it seems that the driving force is to
promote better professionals to serve in the market economy. There has been a change in values, towards more materialism.

Education does not occur only in schools or formal settings, the media is making a significant impact on people’s education. The challenge is to work with media and all those stakeholders that are educating our children, said Mr. Motomura. This leads to the idea that education efforts should be directed not only to children and youth, but also to decision makers. The sectors that are benefitting from exerting power and influence over the world will pose great resistance to change. It is important to be aware of this resistance and the political barriers to achieving change. This awareness should be nurtured through both education and the media.

Knowing the challenges and their complexity is not enough, said Mr. Motomura. It is important to bring creativity, foster synergies, and build bridges to bring about systemic solutions. And, there should be collective leadership, as in “the community taking care of the community”, to be able to move forward on implementation. Hence, education must be more than just informing, but also should foster action.

Conference participants were then invited to discuss Mr. Motomura’s points in groups of three. The groups discussed the importance of synergies and creating many bridges and collaboration that can emerge as avenues to generate wider impact.

One aspect that was widely discussed by participants was “how to bring about these paradigmatic changes to all education systems and society in general?” Mr. Capra said that he works on disseminating knowledge on systems that is grounded on western science and linked to other kinds of knowledge. He said, “I can give a solid case about the importance of stopping using fossil fuels as our main energy source, but the values system of the people receiving the message will filter whether they “hear” the message or not”. To address this issue, societies need to introduce values for sustainability in the systems (political,
economic, education). Some schools do not teach values, so it will be important to start introducing them. What type of values? Justice, peace, and sustainability.

Mr. Capra referenced the Earth Charter and stressed society’s good fortune that after a global consultation, these values for sustainability have been mapped out, and that they exist in this document. The challenge, he stated, is that we now need to introduce them in different systems.

Mr. Motomura said, “The old system is dying. Now there is an excellent opportunity to build a new system. The question is how can we be a protagonist in this? It is important that each one of us think about our personal and collective roles to bring about the changes we want to see in the world.

Session 4 – Strategies and practices for the implementation of policies and actions of these education movements

Moderator: Mateo Castillo, University of Michoacan, México
Alicia Vargas, Vice Minister of Education, Costa Rica
Silvia Sa, Education Manager, Instituto Akatu, Brazil
Kifah Sasa, UNDP, Costa Rica
Manuel Baquedano, Director, Instituto de Ecología Política, Chile

The main objective of this session was to provide some examples of actions in terms of policies, programmes, plans, and other types of actions where the education initiatives highlighted in this forum have been put into action. Mateo Castillo also asked the speakers to think about how an ethical framework such as the Earth Charter could help to advance the educational objectives of those initiatives.

Alicia Vargas started this session by offering an overview of Costa Rica’s history with environmental and sustainability policies, in particular those related to education. First, environmental policies and actions started in the 1970s with the creation of several national parks, and then in the 1980’s more comprehensive environmental studies were carried out to generate strategies including a very important one drafted in 1990: the National Strategy on Conservation and Sustainable Development.
There have been difficulties with the Costa Rican government’s sustainability commitment, but Ms. Vargas mentioned that this present Government has created a National Development Plan that focuses on promoting economic development with social justice, integrating environmental concerns as well.

As part of this Plan, the Ministry of Education is in the process of drafting a Ministerial Policy on Education for Sustainable Development. This policy will have an impact on the curricula of all public education institutions in the country, including higher education institutions to some degree. In addition, this policy will make provisions to create more capacity building opportunities on sustainability for teachers.

Silvia Sa, from the Akatu Institute in Brazil, shared the Institute’s experiences working on responsible consumption education there. The institute specifically works on education and communication. Since 2001, Akatu has been creating campaigns on “conscious consumption”. These campaigns include workshops and sharing of information through social media on this topic. On their website, Akatu has a test that anyone can take to learn if they are conscious consumers. They also do annual surveys that the Federal Government uses to identify changes in consumers preferences.

Edu Akatu is a free online platform for primary education that has many resources to promote behavioral changes that are based on the Earth Charter. The materials follow the following pedagogical principles: relevance (understand the impact of my actions); interdependence (how my consumption patterns have an impact on all); focus on daily actions; give examples of real actions; replication and sense of belonging (it is important to build networks of practice, to support one another in commitments to change).

The Akatu Institute has trained two million teachers and 23 million students using virtual means and resources, but they admit it is very important to have partners to be able to have a wider reach.

Kifah Sasa spoke about the importance of creating public policies with a systemic perspective. With the post 2015 agenda, the UN is affirming that if it is not sustainable it is not development. This means that there is hope that development plans will propose actions that see the interactions between different issues and generate systemic solutions. He shared that “…a good example of a political action in Costa Rica that follows this perspective is the one that banned junk food from school cafeterias. Three problems were attacked with this action: obesity; attention deficit; and waste from plastic bags and bottles. There continue to be objections to this solution, so it is not a public policy yet, but it is a good example of the type of actions needed.”

In terms of the Earth Charter, Mr. Sasa mentioned that although it is important to have an ethical orientation in education processes, it is also important to move to operationalization, to take actions that show how these values can be put into practice. When dealing with sustainability in the curricula, Mr. Sasa proposed making efforts to contextualize this concept to make it understandable to most people.
Manuel Baquedano spoke about the national context in Chile regarding education and sustainable development policies. There is an inherent conflict between Chile’s development model and environmental protection actions, since this country’s main economic activities are related to exports of natural resources, and these include mining and large scale agriculture.

Nonetheless, it has been possible for the Chilean Government and civil society to promote some policies related to sustainability. One of them is the National Policy on Education for Sustainable Development. It took over one year to consult and draft this Policy, the drafting was coordinated by the Ministry of Education but it is the Ministry of Environment the one in charge of its implementation. This policy introduced the concept and practices of sustainable communities in education settings. Mr. Baquedano shared that an important education reform that is going on in Chile to strengthen public education, is the Government decision to make all education free.

In terms of the Earth Charter, he said that this document is well known by those working in the Ministries of Education and Environment, but to be able to fully endorse such document, approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is needed and they have been more reluctant to do so.

Session 5 – Strengthening partnerships and education networks

Moderator: Adriana Zacarías, UNEP – Education for Sustainable Lifestyle

Manrique Arguedas, Redies, Earth University, Costa Rica

Hiro Sakurai, Soka Gakkai International, Japan/USA

Jairo Vargas, Representative of the Ministry of Justice and Peace, Costa Rica

Alexander Likhotal, President, Green Cross International, Russia
As an example of a collaborative effort to work in networks, **Manrique Arguedas** mentioned the example of REDIES, which is a network of Costa Rican Universities interested in promoting environmental management to create sustainable University campuses country-wide. All major universities of Costa Rica are part of REDIES, and since many of these campuses are like small cities, their actions to reduce waste, energy consumption, water use, and other environmental actions have an significant positive impact, especially for surrounding communities. Members of this network follow a set of indicators to assess their environmental performance, and then they collaborate to solve problems. In REDIES, members meet once a month and they organize collaborative activities, sometimes including capacity building activities. Sharing these activities helps to create stronger bonds between members.

**Hiro Sakurai** belongs to a large faith-based organization called Soka Gakkai International (SGI). This organization has been working in partnership with other organizations for many years in helping to advance the objectives and actions of UN Agencies related to sustainable development and peace. SGI participates actively in civil society processes within the UN. To bring about collaboration it needs time, time to hear different perspectives, time to spend with representatives from different countries to learn their views, and time to share experiences. In the post 2015 development agenda negotiation process, education was voted as one of the most important aspects to promote sustainable development, making it vital to continue to focus on improving education experiences to meet the sustainability goals.

**Jairo Vargas** is the coordinator of the Costa Rican national Peace Network (Red de Paz), which is a multistakeholder network that the Ministry of Justice and Peace is promoting to generate actions to promote a peaceful society, as part of the National Development Plan.

In collaboration with government institutions such as the Ministry of Education, the network is collaborating in creating Civic Centers to prevent violence in schools. Also, in high schools it has created
a network of Youth and Peace and launched a campaign on High Schools without guns. The private sector supports this youth network by offering resources to create contests and different actions that involve arts and music. With a group of NGOs, universities, private sector organizations, and other government institutions, the network organized the annual Peace Festival on September 21st, 2014.

Based on Mr. Vargas’ work experience, to be successful in working in partnerships it is important to consider the following elements:

1. Generate win-win actions, otherwise the network becomes unsustainable;
2. Have a defined agenda and invite not only “friends” and those who speak our own “language” but also partners that will contribute to this agenda;
3. Have a communications strategy in place (include all details, from the way to write meeting minutes, to communication protocols);
4. Unify the discourse;
5. Identify actions to take, responsibilities, and indicators of accomplishment.

Finally, Alexander Likhtatal reflected on the lessons learned from his experience with a World Universities Consortium that has over 1,000 members. Members of this Consortium agree that the present education model needs to change because education is the most important tool for change in our society. Education must be adapted to address the current realities and challenges societies are facing.

Although Mr. Likhtatal agreed on the importance of education, he was very critical about it: “We have lost an important component – critical thinking.” What does our education system need to change? Humanization. Education processes should not resemble assembly lines. Any type of education, even if it’s “hard science” should be preceded by education in the arts, music, and humanities. He noticed that at least 80% of the Nobel laureates were musicians as well. According to him, ethics and values are important aspects for humanizing education.

Universities around the world are structured using the western model, and it should not be so as we live in a diverse world. Societies need to adapt the model to different cultural contexts. Students should not only be recipients of someone else’s knowledge, they should be subjects of learning. It is in the borders of disciplines that great achievements are made, that is why students should have the flexibility to move between disciplines.

The Earth Charter can become a stimulus for an education evolution to reinstate the values needed in education. After World War I, a process of ethical blindness started. People could not bear the responsibility after all the destruction, and the modern era started. Then, with post-modernism, an era of guilt began. We banned the expression of values in our lives, and that is why we need to reinsert them.
In discussing global citizenship, Dr. Likhotal stated that in today’s globalized world people will become global citizens, but this should not make individuals detach from their families, culture, tradition, and individual identities.

Closing remarks

Severn Cullis-Suzuki, David Suzuki Foundation and ECI Council, Canada

Kartikeya Sarabhai, Center for Environment Education and ECI Council, India

Kartikeya Sarabhai recalled the post 2015 development agenda, saying that for the first time the global community is defining a minimum common denominator on sustainable development. Nonetheless, it is impressive to realize that despite all the knowledge we have acquired to understand the present difficulties at the global scale, we have not moved forward faster to find solutions for these problems. For Mr. Sarabhai, corruption is one of the biggest limitations to many actions at the local level to change the status quo.

In terms of education, it is important to think about the pedagogy to promote sustainability. In Hyderabad, India, one school girl said that it was enough to hear about our negative impact on things such as our footprint. She wanted to do something about it and have a tool to help us visualize our positive impact on things, which was then translated into the handprint project. This tool was then created to have a record of the positive actions we can do to support nature and our surrounding communities.

“We are facing challenges that are not at a human scale”, said Severn Cullis-Suzuki referring to our present unsustainability problems. We have large responsibilities and we need to figure out what to do about them.

To face these challenges we need some “magic”, she said. Where can this magic be found?

First, it is important to always remember the global scale of the problems we face but also the necessity of empowering ourselves to take action at the local level.

Second, we need systems thinking. We also need to build communities, because they can create magic.

Finally, nature is the answer to our ills. We need to get into nature and start listening to her.
The Forum was successful in achieving its objectives. The discussion on the different aspects of education needed to move human societies towards sustainable development was rich and useful in understanding the different approaches and where they can overlap and share ideas. Following the systems perspective presented by Mr. Capra, the Forum succeeded in moving the sustainability discourse on education forwards through collaboration and community. The participants left at the end of the day imbued with a hopeful sense that many around the world are working towards implementing education that will allow for the flourishing of the Earth Community in the spirit of the Earth Charter.
ANNEX I: Forum Objectives and Program

**Forum objectives:**

1. Offer a space of dialogue to learn about different global initiatives to foster education for: sustainable development, global citizenship, and sustainable consumption.

2. Identify challenges, opportunities and common underlying values that drive these efforts.

3. Share strategies and practices for creating and implementing education policies at the national level.

4. Generate inputs for the emerging Framework for Action on Education post-2015 as a contribution to the next World Education Forum to be celebrated in South Korea.

5. Contribute to the 10 YFP Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme.

6. Reflect on the importance of the Earth Charter as a common ethical framework to both guide all of these initiatives and highlight commonalities and potential synergies.

7. Reinforce and expand partnerships and networking opportunities with institutions working on these education movements.
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