

A Tool for Communities to Implement the Earth Charter *Partnership for Sustainable Communities, USA*

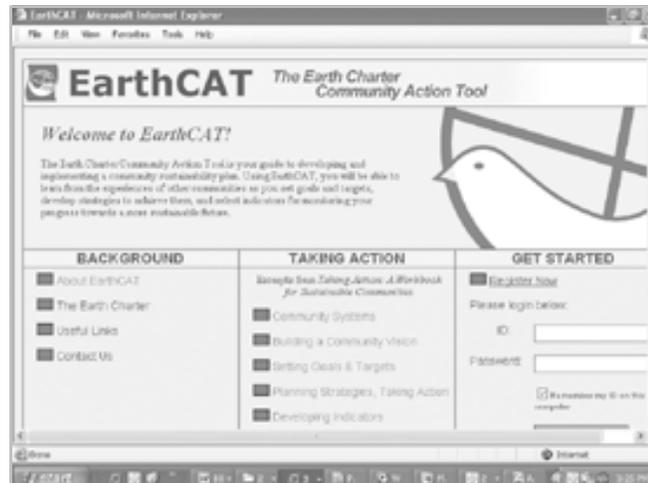
Background

Of the approximately 400 communities that have endorsed the Earth Charter, only a small minority have incorporated its principles into their community governance and social existence. In order to further the development of necessary tools to help local communities use the Earth Charter in the everyday life, an Earth Charter Partnership for Sustainable Communities (ECPSC) was formed in 2003 between the World Resources Institute, Global Communities Initiative, and the Earth Charter Initiative.

Two complimentary resources were developed to help communities undertake sustainability programmes: a methodology workbook and an online management support software. The workbook is titled, *Taking Action for Sustainability*, and the online management support software is called, *EarthCAT: The Earth Charter Community Action Tool*.

Aim

The main objective in developing the EarthCAT software and accompanying workbook is to provide communities with a step-by-step, self-directed guide on how to develop goals, targets and strategies to implement sustainable practices. It also offers a tool to measure their progress using indicators and reporting systems. An additional goal is to connect all communities working with the tool via a shared database.



The home-page of EarthCAT

Partners and participants

As was mentioned, the partners of the project were the World Resources Institute (WRI), Global Community Initiatives (GCI), and the Earth Charter Initiative. Intended participants are local communities who choose to work with the resources.

Timeframe

The project started in 2003. Version 1.0 of the EarthCAT software was released at the Sustainable Communities conference in Vermont, USA, in July 2004. The accompanying methodology workbook, was completed in January 2005 and is under revision after receiving feedback from different groups, municipal associations and their member communities who tested it.

Description

The EarthCAT software helps do the following:

- Create excitement and momentum
- Build a community vision
- Develop skills for community organizing
- Set goals and targets
- Plan strategies and take action
- Develop indicators
- Prepare a community sustainable development plan
- Track and report progress

The software provides the means to effectively store the information that communities generate to develop their action plans. It leads users through the major Earth Charter principles, one by one, helping them set specific goals, targets, strategies, and indicators guided by each principle. There is a built-in database, allowing users to see what goals other communities have set.

Upon setting their priorities and developing plans, communities can add their own data to the database to track progress, assess, and revise their strategies over time. EarthCAT also allows

EarthCAT strives to provide value to communities in three major ways:

- Provides a methodology that gives clear steps to take in defining goals and targets, developing strategies, and measuring progress.
- Shares experiences of other local communities via a database.
- Provides practical instruction and theoretical background for the overall process of developing a community's plan.

communities to generate reports, and citizens to browse the community's plan. Both of these features facilitate transparency and accountability.

Funding

The Philanthropic Collaborative provided seed funding for the initial phase of the project, with matching funds coming from GCI and WRI. However, as of September 2005, ECPSC has not found a source of financial support for training communities in developing countries. North American cities have been paying for the training themselves.

Results

The project's primary outputs were the two resources developed – the software and the workbook. There appear to be three main categories of users for the EarthCAT and the workbook: individual city government and communities, community unions and networks, and international organisations of cities and communities.

Already, there has been significant interest in EarthCAT as a planning methodology. The City of Newburgh, NY, USA, and the City of Calgary, Alberta in Canada are using the test edition of the workbook for two substantial long-range planning projects. Newburgh is in the process of creating their first Sustainable Master Plan, and Calgary has embarked on an ambitious 100 year plan for the city, called Imagine Calgary. Workshops have been delivered to the Calgary Regional Partnership, a coalition of municipalities that surround the city.

Selected efforts include:

- The U.S. National League of Cities offered the very first training workshop on EarthCAT to their members in January 2005, provided by GCI.

- The South African Local Government Association (SALGA), worked with GCI to offer an EarthCAT workshop to the staff of Ekurhuleni, a city outside of Johannesburg, in September 2004.

Possible future international efforts:

The Peruvian Committee of Mayors, the Institute for Community Development in Ukraine, an NGO, and several cities in China are also interested in participating in the training and using EarthCAT to help build local capacity for planning and community development. The main barrier at this point for the communities and organizations in less affluent areas of the world is a lack of funding.

Conclusion

Each community is different, varying in size, composition, and organization. The Earth Charter Action Tool (EarthCAT) has risen to the challenge of providing communities with a general framework that permits them to identify their own priorities and approaches as they work towards a sustainable future.

Once it has been used by more groups, one of EarthCAT's main benefits will be the opportunity it presents for communities to learn from each other. The goals, targets, strategies, and indicators developed by communities become available for future communities to assess and adopt as they create their own sustainable development plan.

Sources: This case was directly drawn from the following materials:

- <http://www.earthcat.org/> accessed on September 29, 2005
- Earth Charter Annual Report 2004
- Earth Charter 5-year Progress Report, Chapter: *"The Earth Charter and Local Communities"*