



Earth Charter International Plan for the Rio+20 Conference

The Rio+20 Conference

On 14th - 16th May 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or the “Rio+20 Conference” will take place in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio+20 Conference’s objectives are to (a) secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, (b) assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and (c) address new and emerging challenges. The focus of the Conference will also include the following two themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Earth Charter and Rio+20

The Earth Charter was born out of the call by the Brundtland Commission report “Our Common Future” for a new set of international norms to guide nations towards sustainable development and the failure of the world community to agree to such an ethical framework at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is to promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and a global society founded on a shared ethical framework that includes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, universal human rights, respect for diversity, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of peace.

The Earth Charter Initiative vision is of individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and multilateral institutions throughout the world, including the United Nations General Assembly and UN agencies, acknowledging the Earth Charter, embracing its values and principles, and working collaboratively to build just, sustainable, and peaceful societies.

The goal of the Earth Charter Initiative for Rio+20 is to emphasize the need for a comprehensive ethical framework articulating shared values and principles to inspire and guide different actors in the transition to a sustainable future and to demonstrate the relevance of the Earth Charter to the objectives of Rio+20 Conference and process.

The ECI Rio+20 objectives are to:

1. Collaborate with the preparatory process and help ensure the successful outcome of the Rio+20 goals.
2. Draw government and non state actors’ attention to the need for an inclusive ethical framework and shared values that inspires and helps guide intergovernmental and government decisions towards strong sustainability and a green economy and the role the Earth Charter can play in facilitating this process.
3. Present the Earth Charter as a comprehensive articulation of shared values and a vision of strong sustainability, and as an integrated ethical foundation for a green economy.
4. Invite governments and non state actors to make use of the Earth Charter as an ethical framework and guide for advancing sustainability.

The Earth Charter as an ethical framework can support the Conference’s objectives and themes through the following line of actions.

1. The Ahmedabad Process

The Earth Charter Initiative's goal for Rio+20 is captured by the "Ahmedabad Process" - a recommendation arising from the 2010 Earth Charter+10 Conference on Ethical Framework for a Sustainable world held in India.

"The participants of the Ahmedabad Earth Charter+10 conference noted the ongoing and urgent need for a holistic and comprehensive ethical framework that cuts across conventions and the special role the Earth Charter can play in facilitating this process. Participants recommended that the Centre for Environment Education work with the Indian Government and through them the world community, to take this message to national governments at Rio+20, the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development."

It was further recommended that the governments of India, South Africa, and Brazil be approached and requested to use the Earth Charter as a instrument to help better integrate ethical considerations into the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) (Rio+20). These countries could take the lead in ensuring that Rio+20 was distinguished by the central place in discussions and decisions given to the ethical dimension of sustainable development.

2. Inspiration and commitment

The Rio+20 Conference's first objective is to "to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development". Such renewed political commitment will require support from a "bottom up" process of reinvigorating civil society and the business sector's understanding of and commitment to sustainable development. The Earth Charter can play a vital role in helping to inspire this necessary renewal as acknowledged by the European Economic and Social Committee which has recommended that "The Summit should recognise and support the Earth Charter as a means of inspiring commitment and action by individuals and organisations around the world".

3. A comprehensive approach

The second and third objectives of the Rio+20 Conference are (a) assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, and (b) addressing new and emerging challenges. Six challenges identified in PrepCom1 were: multiple crises; challenging the global development model; water resources management; education; climate change; and global biodiversity loss.

The Earth Charter's contribution here is to demonstrate a systemic, comprehensive approach that recognizes root causes and the role of ethics in bringing about the necessary transformations. The Earth Charter provides a shared vision of a sustainable future and a clear understanding of what is meant by sustainable development in terms of "strong sustainability". Its principles can be applied to help ensure that global governance processes promote holistic and comprehensive analysis and decisions. The Earth Charter's principles can be used to guide debate on specific government policies and initiatives that involve substantive steps toward implementation of actions to progress sustainable development. Policies and initiatives are needed at the Rio+20 Conference that will give effect to Earth Charter principles.

4. The Green Economy and Global Governance

Two themes for the Rio+20 Conference are (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development. Regarding the first theme, the Earth Charter provides an ethical framework for defining the meaning of a green economy, and characterizing its objectives in specific terms. For example, the first four Earth Charter principles can be taken as articulating the goals that a green economy should serve. The second theme – institutional

framework - will include discussions on the future of UNEP and how the UN system can better deal with sustainable development issues. However, the question of the most appropriate institutional framework is related to the broader issue of global governance, and here again the Earth Charter can be viewed as providing the ethical norms needed to frame and guide new approaches to these issues. The Earth Charter Initiative can make a significant contribution to these Rio+20 deliberations by inviting experts to write reports and papers commenting on the two Conference themes through the lens of the Earth Charter's ethical framework. These documents can then be used to contribute to the dialogue in the lead up to and during the Rio+20 Conference.

5. Education for sustainable development (ESD)

UNESCO has long recognized the pivotal role of culture and education in reducing poverty, protecting the environment, and achieving the goals of sustainable development. The Earth Charter has been extensively used in ESD in a variety of settings and many excellent case studies have been documented. Working with UNESCO and ministries of education, the Earth Charter network can help ensure that education for sustainable development is central to the Rio+20 deliberations and outcomes.

Implementation of the plan

This plan is presented as a "prospectus" for individuals and organisations in the Earth Charter network to use in their Rio+20 engagement. The contribution of partners is the key to the plan's success. Earth Charter Affiliate and Partner organisations, the Honorary Co-Chairs and Advisers, along with Earth Charter Commissioners and Council members, will be invited to take a leadership role in taking forward the five lines of action noted above.

The Earth Charter International Secretariat will play a catalysing and supporting role in the plan's implementation. The Earth Charter Communication Strategy for 2011 and 2012 will be aligned with the ECI goals for Rio+20, and will seek to raise awareness of the Earth Charter and show its linkages with the efforts to promote a green economy and the vision of strong sustainability. Resources permitting, a side event in the November 2011 intercessional and another one in the PrepCom III will be organized with key government, private sector and NGO leaders to help advance the plan's goal and objectives.

The plan will be shared with a broad set of organisation who have endorsed the Earth Charter or are supportive of its mission including: Earth Charter Affiliate organisations such as the Centre for Environment Education; Partner organisations such as Green Cross International; The Stakeholder Forum; The Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and the Development (FBOMS) ; IUCN ; Youth Network within the UN-CSD process and Rio+20; organizations involved in the Religions & Spirituality Task Force; and the Global Transition Initiative. A special effort will also be made to engage with organisations and initiatives concerned with the private sector and the green economy including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). These and other organisations will be approached and requested to consider integrating the Earth Charter into their efforts for achieving good outcomes at Rio+20.

For more information
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